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THE
BLACKEST OF LIES.

A Novel

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

ALBANY DE FONBLANQUE,

Author of "A Tangled Skein," "Cut Adrift," "Filthy Lucre," &c., &c.

"And the parson he made it his text that week, and he said likewise
That a lie which is half a truth is ever *the blackest of lies*,
That a lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight."

TENNYSON.

VOL. III.



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THE BLACKEST OF LIES.

CHAPTER I.

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

"WHAT do you think of my lady now?" René asked his father, as they walked back to the Langham.

"That she is feeling mighty bad," replied the Judge drily.

"Serve her right! Did you ever hear of anything so vindictive! And without the least necessity or excuse. Why are women so cruel to each other?"

"I've been trying to figure it out, sonnie, and it seems to me that in this particular case there's a spice of envy in it. You see



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street, marked by melancholy for her own. It was "the lonesome October," and he had nothing on earth (that is to say, in London) to do.

Lady Pem bent forward, and there, rubbing his shin stood the spoiler of the violet velvet!

"Oh, Fred!" she exclaimed, "I'm so glad! are you hurt? I was going to—never mind. Take me to luncheon somewhere, like a good boy—won't you? I've got into a scrape—about Owen, and I'm half *famished*."

Nevertheless the delicate repast which came at Lord Longbow's call, as though he had Aladdin's lamp at his watch chain, went away almost untouched—all but the wine. Lady Pem took a glass or two of champagne more than she would probably have ventured on at her own table, and this gave her courage to satisfy her entertainer as to why she was alone in town.

Longbow was anxious on this score, as men will be who hate a woman to compromise herself—except in their way.

He heard some of the truth. Owen had got into a scrape “years and years ago,” and some of the consequences were sprung upon him now. “I tried,” Lady Pem concluded, with a sigh, “to help him out, but I must admit I’ve made bad worse.”

“Does Pembury know?” asked the young man, but whether he meant *know* about his brother-in-law’s scrape, or his wife’s escapade, was not made clear; as Lady Pem took up her gloves and said it was time to go to the station.

He got her a carriage to herself, in the usual way, and stood at the door waiting for the train to start. She was looking sad, and sadness became her. He knew that she was unhappy over more than Owen’s troubles, and they had played together as children!

"You know, of course," he said, rather huskily, "that if I can be of any use"—

"Dear old Fred! how good you are," and her eyes filled.

There were some tears, but more champagne, I am afraid—in them.

"I cannot bear to see you suffer so—and alone," he eagerly whispered, "mayn't I come with you a little way?"

He got no answer from her lips, but with a word to the guard who had blown his whistle and was closing the doors; he sprang into the carriage, and the train started.

"I should get into a fearful row if this were known," she said, as they crossed the river, "and have gone into hysterics if I'd been left alone with my troubles. Well! a crying fit in the hand, is worse than two rows in the bush; so don't look so grave. What

were you thinking about when you got so nearly run over ? ”

“ About you.”

“ Really ? How odd ! and I was thinking about you. I told you I was going to my dressmaker’s about that dress you ruined—don’t you remember ? ”

He did well ; and the reminiscence is a risky one challenged by those soft swimming eyes.

It takes him back to the billiard-room at Hadlow Hall, that night when he was so devoted (by order) to Lady Bournemouth, and the echo of an almost brutal rebuff given by husband to wife sounds in his ear, and makes it tingle.

He has not the courage to look at her face, he is commanded not to go near her. He sets his teeth and walks off, sore and angry to a half-curtained recess with a dais where

the table with fizzing stuffs and strong waters is placed, and makes himself a S and B—particularly B.

It is at his lips, when the injured wife, who has borne her wound bravely before the other women, laughed at it in fact; takes advantage of the confusion at the end of a pool, and comes for the glass of water for which she would have given her diamonds five minutes ago, if no one could have seen her take it.

She has had many small worries during the day; is weak and worn out, so that this latter blow hurts her more than some of its harder predecessors have done.

She walks with her usual slow and sweeping grace, and has just enough strength to take her to the curtains. She clutches at them, trips on the step of the dais, and is caught in the arms of—her old playfellow.

Down goes the S and B, and the violet velvet's reign is over !

He holds her in his arms whilst you might count ten, he feels her sob, and she murmurs, " Oh, Fred ! "

Her sobs check the usual beatings of his heart, and teach it one of the devil's favourite marches. Did you ever have a tune as they say, " running in your head ? " If so, you know how every sound—the rattle of wheels, the splash of oars, the moaning of the wind, the ticking of a clock, take it up, and stamp the hateful memory deeper and deeper. Get a tune such as Fred Longbow had running in his *heart*, and it is worse still. Every time Lord Pembury said spiteful things to, or of, his wife ; every time she looked sad, the devil's bandmaster stamped his foot and waved his stick, and the march went on.

For Lady Pem also this little scene had

remembrances which sometimes please, sometimes trouble her. She made herself comfortable on a corner seat—put up her feet, took off her gloves, and dabbed her forehead with some eau de Cologne she had made Fred get out and buy on the way to the station.

“Do you know,” she went on, when he had answered her question, “what that delightful Mrs. Archer-Fleetwood, who calls herself my dearest friend, said about it? She told young Norton that I was tipsy—said she counted how many glasses of wine I drank at dinner, and that I had gone for *brandy*.”

“The beast!”

“She is rather like that beautiful leopardess at the Zoo. If they had known that you were behind the curtains, there was not a woman in the room who would not have

sworn I went there to kiss you. But everybody thought that you rushed to my assistance, and caught me, so that's all right. Even Charlie, who makes mischief out of everything, didn't guess. If he had—I do really think that in the temper he was in that night, if he had known that you were there, he would have *beaten* me."

She leaned her head back into the corner as she spoke, shut her eyes and let her ungloved hand fall languidly on the arm of the seat. To a passage in the Devil's March which was played low and sweet, Lord Longbow bent his head down and kissed the white warm fingers murmuring—

"My poor darling!"

"Silly boy!" she murmured, opening her eyes, but moving not, except to tap him playfully on the cheek. "You must not do that."

Still the hand fell back to the same place, where he held it in both his own, and not a word was spoken for the next ten miles.

At the junction she roused herself and told him he must get out.

"I'm all right now," she said, "after that little nap. Did you go to sleep too! No! How I've bored you, and you so good to me! You can get back to town before dinner-time, I daresay. Now you must really go."

"Dear Claire, let me see you soon, won't you? Write to me at any rate—about Owen you know, and when shall I see you again?"

"I don't know," she answered petulantly, "Charlie is such a fool. Stay—I'm coming to town for a day on the 25th, and if you are good, *very* good; much better" (shaking her head at him), "than you've been to-day, you may call."

"Where?" he eagerly asked.

“At the house, of course; under the marital roof, and protecting Ægis of the butler.”

Partly during that “little nap” and partly during the drive home, she made up the story that was to be told her lord. He met her looking as black as Othello, and before he could get beyond “What the”—she came out with her news.

“You will be glad to hear that Owen’s marriage is broken off.”

“Hum—m!” he grunted, relieved, and yet annoyed.

He was glad to escape from the threatened connection with Pearl Herbert, and sorry not to be able to scold his wife. He had bottled up a fine tap of wrath to be poured out upon her, and it was of no use.

“Is this your doing?” he asked, with an ungracious stress on the *your*.

"Well, honestly," she replied, "I cannot claim all the credit. It was done before I reached him, but I was not aware of it ; and had no time to lose."

"What was the matter ? "

"My dear Charlie," she replied, folding her gloves with much deliberation, "you told me over and over again to let that woman alone, and I have obeyed you until my poor brother was dragged in. Now—don't you see it's *his* affair, and, unless you press me very hard, I ought not—please, Charlie, don't ask this."

She laid her hand on his shoulder, and looked up in his face with a pretty, pleading smile that would have won a kiss in the old days before blue books and society. It only checked a growl now.

"Well," he said, "perhaps you're right. Did you see any one in town besides your brother ? "

“The Ranletts ; they were with him.”

“Any one else ? ”

\ “My dressmaker.”

“I am not thinking of tradespeople,” he snapped, “and you know it. Did you see Longbow ? ”

She looked him full in the face without a quiver or a blush, and said—

“No.”

Then, when he had turned aside, she added—

“Really, Charlie, you are *too* absurd about that boy.”

“Boy ! It makes me sick to hear you women talking of him as a *boy*, and petting him as you do. *Boy*, indeed ! why he came of age last year.”

“He looks seventeen ! ”

“And has all the vices of twenty-seven. You don’t hear what I do about him. He is

a bad and dangerous man, as many a woman knows to her cost."

"What a wolf!" she replied. "Poor Fred! I wonder where he gets his sheep's clothes made—they fit so well."

CHAPTER II.

RENUNCIATION.

WHEN the Ranletts reached the Langham they found the other surprise (hinted at in my last chapter) awaiting them. One of the notes given to Pearl by her stockbroker had been traced, and to George Marshall !

“So, gentlemen,” explained the detective, “as the young lady lived in his house, and it looks just a trifle strange, I thought I’d better not let him know till I had seen you.”

The answer was that Mr. Marshall had their implicit confidence, that nothing should be kept from him ; and off they went to the works.

Marshall was the most astonished man in

the borough of Southwark that day when he saw his signature on the back of the note.

"I remember paying it," he said, "to my coal merchant (for the house) a day or two ago, and as I was a new-comer he asked me to sign it; but if you were to give me the Bank of England I could not tell you where I got it."

"Perhaps you had it in change for a cheque on your own bank," suggested the detective.

"No," Marshall said; "now I think of it, I must have taken it from the safe here. My wife asked me to bring home some money, and I forgot it till after banking hours. I took a note, and, I think, six pounds in gold, that had been paid for small orders. Let me see." He rummaged in a most disorderly desk, and found a sheet of paper in which these payments had been roughly entered.

“Everything is in confusion,” he continued.

“Mr. Barkdale will not send me a cashier, and it is utterly impossible—yes! there are nine payments here, each over five pounds, and I daresay some of them were made in notes; but *I* didn’t think of getting any one to put his name on them.”

“You haven’t even got the addresses,” observed the detective severely; “but I suppose the order-book will show.”

“There isn’t an order-book yet,” Marshall replied, irritated by the man’s tone. “There’s nothing but confusion. We have only just begun: and begun too soon, I see that now.”

The detective gave a shrug, took a copy of that paper, and departed, saying he would do his best, but things had got very loose again.

“George,” said René, “this won’t do

at all. You're overweighted and overworked, and haven't a business hair in your head, for all your talent. Let *me* be your book-keeper and cashier, for the present at least. I want something to occupy my mind. Work will do me good. It will be a favour to me, I give you my word. This cursed waiting is wearing me out. Now like a good fellow let me go at it *now*, and see if I can't put things a little straight."

"It's a good thought," said the Judge, emphasising the decision with a thump of his stick. "Take him up, Mr. Marshall. He can do it, and he will."

So René Ranlett became *de facto* business manager of the Albert Works, and at the close of the week had an interview (at Marshall's request) with the nominal head of the firm. It was most unsatisfactory.

"I never saw such a man," René reported.

“He is absolutely impracticable. Leaves it all to you, and yet will not give written authority for anything. Won’t even say he approves. Of course, legally speaking, you—as his partner—can bind him; but his conduct is most extraordinary. At last I offered to buy him out.”

“*You!*” exclaimed Marshall.

“Why not? I cannot leave England as long as she lives, and I must have something to do or I shall go crazy.”

“And what did he say?”

“Say? Nothing! Got up and stamped, as though I were a child teasing him—the old fool!”

“Did you mention Smith’s account, and the bill for machinery?” Marshall asked anxiously. These were payments which had to be made in a day or two for the extensions of the works; and large ones, too.

“I did,” said René, “and he stammered something about writing. ‘There’s nothing to write,’ I told him, ‘except a cheque,’ and upon that he got up and stamped again. I got him to promise though, at last, that his share of the money should be paid into bank on Monday. So that’s all right. As for the rest, he evidently intends to be a sleeping partner, and to sleep sound; so we’ve got to run things our own way. How’s the stained glass getting on?”

“Splendidly!” replied Marshall, with all the enthusiasm of an inventor. “I’ve got the light red to a T. I’ve time to think now, thanks to you. But look here, René, fair is fair. You shan’t work for nothing. I’ll give you”—

“Stick to your last,” René laughed, “and don’t interfere with me. *I’m* business man. I’ll fix my own salary, and pay it too—never fear.”

Faithful to compact, Owen Hilyar was told about the traced note, and immediately remembered what Mr. Flowers had said about the Marshalls. It was their interest to prevent Pearl from marrying *any one*. Could they have spirited her away, or be in the secret if she had voluntarily fled? When he heard that René had taken up a position at the works his suspicions were redoubled. "They are all in league against me," he thought, "keeping her out of my way for his sake." It was a bitter reflection, but it did him good, and hardened the resolution he had formed.

He took no part in the service at his church on the Sunday following Lady Pem's visit; indeed, he never acted again as a clergyman after that fatal scene. He spent the whole day wandering aimlessly about parts of London hitherto unknown to him,

trying to concentrate his mind upon the ordeal that was before him.

Reparation! yes! He had to make Pearl reparation; but not in the way he once contemplated. He had to make her happy, and to eliminate himself utterly from her for life.

The following morning he called on Mrs. Marshall. Even if the Ranletts were acting fairly with him, and Flowers had misjudged the Marshalls in attributing sordid motives to them, they, or one of them, might be aiding Pearl for her own sake, and that one, he felt, was almost certain to be the wife.

As soon as Cissy saw his card, she uttered a joyous cry of "Oh, it's news of Pearl!" which had he heard it would have disconcerted him. She hated him with all the power of her loving, undisciplined mind, and received him as coldly as she could, but with a wildly beating heart.

“I have come to you, Mrs. Marshall,” he began, “rather than to your husband, because I think—I hope that being a woman you may understand me better than he might, and perhaps have some pity.”

Pity for him! for the destroyer of the being who next to her husband and her child was the light of her afflicted life? not a grain of it! and so her face told him.

“If you have come,” she said, “to tell me that Pearl has been found, I will thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

“I have not,” he answered, “but I hope that after what I want to tell you it will be easier to find her. I presume that you know what my sister has unwittingly done?”

Cissy nodded assent.

“That, taken by itself, would make me all the more eager to make every reparation in my power, as it increases the injury to be

repaired. But what *is* reparation? I have been thinking that over. How can I restore Pearl to good fame and happiness? By making her my wife? By giving her a tarnished name, by dragging her down with me into ruin, and by standing between her and the man she loves, for the rest of my wretched life? I think not. Has what you call *society* the right to demand this sort of reparation at any cost to us both, without considering which has sinned the greater sin, or will have to suffer the greater pain? I think not. The higher reasons which actuate me are between me and my God. Will *He* blame the resolve I have taken? I pray not. The reparation I offer Pearl is to take myself out of her life as completely as though I were dead. I want to assure you that I release her from her promise to me, and that I will never try to regain it. That

is all. She has nothing to fear from me, and can return to her friends when she pleases."

"That's all very fine," replied blunt Cissy, "but how are we to let her know."

"You seem to be in communication through the *Times*." He did not like to add—"and perhaps otherwise."

"That's so!" she exclaimed. "It might help. May I say that you give your word of"—(checking herself) "that you *swear* you will never speak to her again."

"You may."

"I'll write it this very minute."

She tottered to her canterbury, but just as she took the first dip of ink, a thought struck, and stopped her. This might be only another trick of an accomplished deceiver.

"What is the meaning of this sudden change?" she asked.

Some colour flushed for an instant his haggard face.

“Just now,” he replied, “I hoped you might have some pity for me. Must you press that question? If so I will answer it, but before you decide, think what I am doing. I love Pearl with all my heart, and I am helping another man to win her! To clear her name, I am making myself an outcast. Can I offer greater proof of sincerity than this? I have waded through a sea of tortures to these determinations. Need I go back with half-healed wounds, and have them torn open?”

“If I could only believe you!” Cissy murmured half convinced.

“I promised my sister that I would not do anything until I saw her again, but this does not affect my resolve what to do. I shall see her on the 25th. That night I sail for—no

matter where ; for the other side of the world, and no one will hear of me again. You can send to see me off if you like, and then perhaps you will believe me."

A man can deceive a woman twice—provided that she loves him—but to repeat the process with another woman who loves *her*, is not so easy. Hilyar made a mistake when he supposed he would get on more easily with Cissy than her husband. George would probably have stopped him half-way with a good natured "Well I suppose that's all right," and have explained why he "could not be hard upon the poor devil." Cissy had reached her writing desk, sped by one of those impulses which are said to lead her sex aright, but paused to give heed to the reasoning supposed to put them wrong.

"No," she replied laying down her pen, "I cannot do this on my own responsibility.

Beside it was agreed that you should all act together. Can you call again this evening and see Mr. Marshall."

"It is as I thought," Owen said to himself. "She is playing us false." Nevertheless the request was a reasonable one, and even if she were acting as he supposed, his end would be gained. Pearl's mind would be relieved, she would return to her friends—to René, and be happy. So he consented, promised to notify the Ranletts so that no time might be lost; and took his leave with a lighter heart than he had brought.

Now this was the very Monday upon which Mr. Barkdale had promised to pay that money into the bank, and he kept his word.

About half-past two René called to see if it were all right, as he had some large cheques to draw next morning, and was just stepping into a cab to go back to his business.

when the detective we know of touched him on the shoulder and asked for "two minutes."

The time was sufficient. They went back together into the Bank; they went forth again together in the cab; and it was closing time before René returned alone to the works. Marshall was waiting for him anxious to know about the money.

"Well" he began at once, "is it all right?"

"Paid in at ten this morning" René replied, "and I've news that will astonish you. I have just come from Barkdale."

"Well?"

"And had it out with him."

"Not quarrelled I hope."

"Oh no. He's not a bad old fellow, after all. He had something on his mind that worried him. He's better now, having made a clean breast of it. He has sold his interest in the works."

"The deuce he has!—when?"

"The contract was made some time ago, and the purchase money paid the day—but no matter at present about the *when*."

"He had no right to sell it at all without consulting me," said Marshall warmly.

"So he felt, and that was one thing that made him so cross. But he was over-persuaded, and made to promise that he would not tell. He wouldn't have told now, unless he had been obliged."

"But it isn't legal," persisted George, getting more and more angry. "He can't force a partner on me against my will. The fellow may want to interfere, and be incompetent. He may be personally offensive to me. René, I won't stand it."

"You've got to; the thing is done. You forget that clause in your partnership deed that either of you might sell out."

“ Ah ! but that was made for me, in case I should want to go to America.”

“ My dear fellow—it cuts both ways ”—

“ It cuts like the deuce and all *my* way,” Marshall growled, “ just as things were going so smooth ! ”

“ They may go on better than ever George. Please God they will. You haven’t asked who the new partner is.”

“ Well, you look so grave about it, I suppose he is some swell.”

“ The senior partner in the Albert Works,” said René, “ is Miss Pearl Herbert.”

CHAPTER III.

“HOW IS SHE LIVING?”

HERE, then, was the secret of the twelve thousand eight hundred and twenty-five pounds drawn by Pearl from her stockbroker's on the day before her disappearance! During her short absence from Birch's she paid it to Mr. Barkdale's attorney, receiving three pounds fifteen shillings and tenpence as the balance, after paying the purchase money and costs of the deed, which made her George Marshall's partner. One of old Mr. Barkdale's peculiarities was to keep large sums of money by him and to pay cash for everything. He got change for the odd five-pound note from his grocer, who paid it to George Marshall for sundry glass wares, and as by

good luck the grocer's name was first on the list taken by the almost despairing detective, the note was traced, and Mr. Barkdale shadowed.

By the terms of his contract with Pearl she was to take the works free from all his liabilities in respect of them. He paid his share of the builder's account with more of the notes, and the cat came out of the bag! When he heard that Pearl had disappeared, the old gentleman was distressed, and frightened almost out of his senses. To clear himself he had to make a clean breast of it, and confess to the conspiracy against George Marshall, in which he and Pearl had been engaged, or, to be more accurate, let me say, in which he had been engaged *by* Pearl, for it was all her work.

She was in treaty with him from the commencement. He wanted to sell the works

outright, but she—knowing that George Marshall could not afford to buy them, and would not accept assistance from her because of the pride that was in him—made Barkdale offer him a share, with the understanding that she should buy the rest in secret, and stand in his place.

Was this intended as a parting gift? At the first flush it looked something like one. Had she gone away to escape thanks, or avoid refusal? If her pious fraud had leaked out, or was even in danger of detection, this might have accounted for her conduct. But she couldn't possibly know beforehand that Barkdale would have to betray her. His supposed neglect of his own interests at the works was mentioned for the first time by Marshall *after* she had gone. If it were a parting gift then she must have arranged to leave them before René Ranlett had proposed,

before her promise to Owen Hilyar had been given, and whilst she was arranging her new home with every sign of content with it, and affection for those who were to share it with her!

At the consultation called that evening for quite another purpose, the *pros* and *cons* were discussed, and it was agreed that the “parting gift” theory must be abandoned.

The fear lest she might have met with foul play on account of the money was also dismissed; but this done, the question arose, how was she living? She had only what was left of that three pounds fifteen, and perhaps a sovereign or two, and some silver in her purse when she left, and she had drawn no cheque.

“It would help us,” observed the Judge, “to know what she took with her in that portmanteau. Can’t you” (to Cissy) “get

at what she has by looking up what she left behind ? ”

“ All her drawers and places are locked,” Cissy replied, “ she is so fearfully tidy.”

“ Then I propose we send for a locksmith, and have them opened.”

“ Oh ! I don’t think I can authorise that,” said George. “ If anything were lost or stolen afterwards it would be most unpleasant. Besides, we have no right to pry into her wardrobes. She tells us to be patient and wait.”

“ *Does she ?* ”

“ Where’s the paper ? Mab, get that *Times* where ”—

“ Don’t trouble,” the Judge interposed. “ The advertisement says so. There’s no doubt about that ; but look here—all of you ! for what I’ve got to say affects Mr. Hilyar’s proposition too. You’ve been arguing *this*,

and conjecturing *that*, and proposing *the other* about Miss Pearl, as though she were some one else. A weak-minded girl would very likely run away from a mess she didn't dare to face, and that sort would take all her good gowns and things with her. A cold-hearted girl wouldn't mind keeping her friends in suspense with a vague, 'Be patient and wait.' But Pearl Herbert is a resolute woman; this last act of hers shows of itself what a will she has, and what a heart, if we didn't know it before. She's a woman of great moral courage. She has faced worse troubles than this one you suppose her to be hiding from, and fought them down. There is nothing half-and-half about *her*. If she had seen your personal in the *Times* that her dearest friend was sick of grief for her, she would either have come straight home, or have hardened, and taken no notice at all."

"She did her best to comfort me," said Cissy, wiping away a tear.

"Why didn't she *write* to you?"

Cissy was startled by the question, and the manner in which it was put. Having addressed Pearl through a newspaper it had hitherto seemed natural that the reply should come in the same way.

"She knows where to find you," Ranlett went on. "Why should she have taken the trouble to answer by advertisement?"

Here George Marshall cut in.

"She was probably afraid of the post-mark."

"My dear sir!" replied the Judge, "she is smart enough to know that she could take her letter to the nearest railroad station and have it posted *anywhere* for less than she paid the *Times*."

By this they had all drawn their chairs

closer to the Judge with eager interest. It will be remembered that he was at Hadlow when Pearl disappeared, and had only very recently returned. His fresh mind seized at once upon a point they had all overlooked. *Why had she not written?*

“Any one could have made up that advertisement,” Ranlett proceeded, “who had read the other; and if Pearl is being kept out of the way unfairly; just such a one would be published to put you off your guard.”

“But who on earth could want to keep her out of the way?” demanded Marshall.

“We must find an answer to some easier questions before we can tackle that,” was the reply, “and the first one is, what were her intentions when she left this house? The middle-sized, black portmanteau holds that secret, but the drawers upstairs can give it.

away. What has not been taken, is left to speak for itself. If she has carried off her most valuable things, we shall know what to think. If she has gone unprovided, or with only what would do for a day or two ; we shall know what to *do*. We shall have to go to the police, and set them on her track, for there's foul play at the end of it."

No one replied. Cissy looked at her husband—René looked at her. Owen Hilyar (whose proposition was lost sight of in these new developments) sat silent ; becoming more and more convinced that the Marshalls were acting a part.

"As for responsibility," resumed the Judge, "you can't get out of it—one way or the other. It seems to me that Miss Herbert would more readily forgive you for opening her locks, if things are right, than you will forgive yourself for having thrown

away a chance of helping her, if they're wrong." This settled it.

"George," said Cissy, "I'll take all the blame. She keeps her keys in her desk. We must break that open, for it has a patent lock, and she carries the key on her watch chain ; but everything else can be opened and locked again, and we can seal up the desk quite safe."

George consented on condition they all acted, but the Judge held that the two young men would be worse than useless, and so they were excused, to their infinite relief.

The desk was broken open, and the first evidence of Pearl's "fearful tidiness" appeared. There were her cheque book, her journal, her accounts, her washing list, her business letters (all docketed and tied up in bundles after their kind) her keys (those in common use in a bright bunch, and the others.

each with a little tag denoting what it belonged to). The same order prevailed throughout, and greatly facilitated the search, in which—by the way—little Mab proved to be a power. She knew every dress and trinket that her idol possessed, and was almost as good as an inventory. The result obtained was as follows : She had not taken all her ready money, for there was a five-pound note in the desk. She had not taken her jewellery. She had not taken her usual travelling suit, or any of her best dresses, or her toilette articles, or—as far as they could tell—a supply of the underwear she had in use.

On the other hand there was missing an old black silk costume, an almost new merino one (which she never liked, and called her “failure”) a flannel dressing-gown, a large woollen shawl, a discarded Derby hat, and a

lot of—well, being a man and liable to make mistakes I had best call them *things*, also out of use, which the owner had put away in what was known as her "Dorcas box."

"Now madam," said the Judge triumphantly, "I put it to you if this is the sort of outfit a young lady like Miss Herbert would select for a long absence?"

Cissy had no reply. She was trembling all over with a shapeless, but crushing weight of fear upon her. George could not trust himself to speak. Poor little Mab was busy folding up and putting away; crying softly the while, and sometimes kissing the dainty raiment dear "Auntie" had worn. As the Judge put his question she shook out a pale blue cashmere tea gown, with a brook of white lace rippling down the front or foaming over silken knots. "She wore this," Mab said, "at breakfast that morning: and

oh, mamma! there's something in the pocket—a letter!"

"Put it back dear," Cissy cried, "we mustn't"—

"Excuse me," interposed the Judge, "that is probably the letter she received just before she left, and if so, it is most important that we should know what it is about. Things have gone too far now," he added with warmth, "for half-measures. You have a level head, Mrs. Marshall. Look at the signature and read the first ten words and you'll know whether to go on or no."

Cissy did as she was told, after a look of assent from George. "Why," she exclaimed, handing him the letter, "it's from some doctor about a poor woman."

The Judge blew off steam in a long-drawn "Ah—ha!"

"I think," he said, after a long pause,

during which Marshall had been standing irresolute with the letter in his hand, "that we may all know what the doctor says."

"We will take it downstairs," George replied, "Mr. Hilyar should be present when it is read."

So it was read, as follows, in full council.

"October 7th.

"MADAM,

"This is written at the request of a poor patient of mine, named Hannah Dyson, who says that she was a witness against you at some trial, and did not speak the truth. She says that she has had nothing but misfortune since she was induced to give that evidence, and I can state of my own knowledge that she has been seriously ill of a bad type of low fever for the last six weeks, and I believe she has been obliged to sell all her clothing to pay her rent and provide medical comforts.

She is now convalescent, and could get up if she had anything to wear, but she has absolutely nothing left. She is also in need of change of air and a nutritious diet, and knows of no one who might help her but you. When I told her it was absurd to appeal to a lady whom she had injured, she replied, ' You do not know Miss Pearl ; please write what I want.' I mention this to show that I am not responsible for beginning a letter asking for charity, with an admission that it is not deserved. She begs you to come and see her, as she has many things to say, which may be of use to you, and will, she thinks, excuse some of her conduct. First, she asks your forgiveness. Then if you will help her with some clothing and a little money (which she promises to repay out of her first wages when she gets into service again) she will be for ever grateful. Her address is 18,

Martin's Place, at the back of the Victoria Station. Your obedient servant,

“R. A. KEMP.”

At about the fourth line, Judge Ranlett sprang from his chair, and began to straddle (as we know was his wont when labouring under excitement). Up and down the room he went, with an occasional, “What’s that?” or “How?” showing that his mind was but partially bent on the reading. When the last sentence was read, he threw up his arms with a cry that came straight from his warm old heart.

“A trap!” he cried. “Poor girl! poor girl! A trap and—my God! what a villain! A common rogue would have made out some case of unmerited suffering to which she might have sent assistance, but this one baits his snare so as to catch *her*. What’s that he makes the woman say? ‘*You don’t know*

Miss Pearl. He did—the lying skunk! He did, too well. He knew that plea for forgiveness would fetch her—and it did.”

“There was no sick woman at No. 18,” said George, unable to catch the full meaning of these outbursts. “We asked particularly about that, knowing how charitable Pearl is. There was only a man lodger, and he was out and well.”

“But the doctor might have made a mistake about the number.” This from Cissy. “It might have been 28, or—anything. She was evidently expected at 18, as the man was there to take her on to the right place.”

“That is so,” said George. “The doctor might have found out his mistake, and put some one on the watch to correct it.”

“Better have left a message at the house,” was René’s comment.

"Right you are, sonnie," said his father with emphasis.

"One cannot think of everything," Cissy persisted. "We know that the man took her away somewhere. Perhaps she has caught the fever from that wretched woman and is ill, dying—oh my Pearl! my darling!—perhaps *dead*."

Judge Ranlett sat himself on the sofa beside her, and took her hand gently in both his own.

"Dear lady," he began in his old courteous manner, "it's bad—mighty bad! but not that way. You mustn't mind my flying out as I did just now. It was wrong in your presence, and I won't do it again. There, now: don't sob so. Pearl hasn't got any fever. You may take my word for that. She has fallen into a trap, but there's no sick woman at the bottom of it. Let us try and

keep all our heads clear to see how we can get her out."

"We must find this Mr. Kemp," suggested George.

"There is no Mr. Kemp," replied the Judge, "to find."

"How can you possibly know that?"

"Because there is no Hannah Dyson. I wanted her in the inquiries I made, and I found out that she died two months after the trial."

CHAPTER IV.

SUSPICION.

“Now then,” said Judge Ranlett, when the surprise caused by this disclosure had somewhat subsided, “the first thing we have to consider is *motive*. Who has a spite against this poor lady, or who can profit by depriving her of her liberty. Those are questions for you” (to the Marshalls) “as you know most about her. Near relations,” he concluded grimly, “are generally the first to look after”—

“She has no relations as I ever heard of,” Cissy replied.

“Has she made a will?”

“We never spoke on the subject,” said George—“never.”

"Now, Mr. Hilyar, it's your turn. What have you got to say?"

"I would rather not say anything," Owen replied.

"Ah, but remember the compact."

"I do. I came here this afternoon to make a proposal, which of itself shows, I think, that I, at least, am acting fairly. It was not accepted. I was told to come again, and when I did it was put aside in favour of quite a different theory in support of which this extraordinary letter is found."

"Well sir?"

"I think that when Miss Herbert is informed that I release her from her promise, and am about to leave the country, that the trap you speak of will open of its own accord."

"Then you suppose that she is deceiving us?"

"And want to make out that she got up

that letter herself! No sir, *Pearl* don't forge letters," Cissy burst out.

"Why don't you tell us at once," said Marshall, "that we are all in a plot against you."

"I make no accusations," Owen replied. "It strikes me as strange that you should have thought of making this search only after I had offered to withdraw an obstacle to *Pearl's* reappearance; and as inconsistent with her methodical habits, that such a letter should be found in the pocket of a dress. I have a right to my deductions, as you have to yours. I don't say that you are in a plot against me—I would not blame you if you were, you all must hate me—but of this I am convinced; it will be much better for *Pearl* if I retire from the search for her. And this I do—now. For my own satisfaction, I shall publish the advertisement I have

suggested, and then you will please to treat me as though we had never met."

"Be it so," said the Judge, "but stop one moment. Will you add a line or two that we will suggest?"

"You can publish what you please for yourselves."

"Hold on! you gave these men your word of honour that you would act with them. If they will take my advice they'll give it you back again; but you can't back out because you want to."

"What do you wish me to add?"

"Something that no one but Miss Pearl herself can answer, and that she would be sure to answer if she were free to do so. That will test whose deductions are right."

"She might be told not to answer at all, if mine are so."

"You are more suspicious than logical, Mr.

Hilyar," the Judge replied stiffly. "If, as you suppose she is keeping away, or being kept away on your account; your renunciation settles the matter."

"I will add what you please, only let it be done at once; I am so weary of all this," said Owen.

Easier said than done. What would they ask, that would not offend, and supply the other conditions? When a dozen questions had been proposed, discussed, and rejected, little Mab hit it in two words—"My ring."

When they left Stafford some men who worked under her father subscribed and gave her a ring, of which she was justly proud. Latterly—to her great sorrow one of its little diamonds fell out, and was lost. Auntie had taken it to some jeweller (unknown) to have the gem replaced, and in his charge it remained. So the advertisement ran :

"PEARL.—O. H. releases you from every promise and will never renew the subject. Mab says, please where is her ring. Cissy, O. H."

On his return home Owen found Mr Flowers smoking (as was his custom) one strong cigar, before he went to bed. They had scarcely met since their last battle, and its subject had not been renewed. Mr. Flowers went forth early, and came home late. If Owen had not been detained on that occasion perhaps they would never have seen each other again.

"Dear friend," said he, "fate is too strong for me. I have to yield, not to your views, no; but I think it will ease your mind when I tell you that I have given Miss Herbert back her promise, and will never ask her to renew it."

Mr. Flowers drew a long breath and laid down his cigar.

“Have you seen her?” he asked.

“No. I have been with her friends the Marshalls, and arranged it with them. You were right in one way. They are in league with her, but not for their own sakes, for Ranlett’s.”

“Hum—m, and she will marry him?”

“I will try to hope so.”

“This is indeed a change. Let it teach you how shallow in reality, are those emotions you men call love.”

“Say rather how deep and deceptive are those we mistake for it until it rises and overwhelms them. Flowers, the rock I have split upon is *Self*. My old passion for Pearl Herbert was selfish; my remorse, when you changed my heart, was selfish; my struggle to make her reparation was selfish. What had I to give in reparation! When I told her that day that I loved her she started from me—

as though I had said 'I am a leper.' I did not know then that Ranlett had won her. I hoped that—yes, you were right, I could not look you in the face and answer the question you put when I told you of the condition she had made. Self again, always self. In my selfishness I pressed her to permit another injury which I called *reparation*. She has fled from it, poor soul! and taught me how to love her best."

"Do you feel sure of this, of this conclusion, I mean?" Flowers asked, poking the fire and shading his face with his hand from the glow of the rekindling coals, "you must not mind my reminding you that you have stated others quite as confidently. At first this woman was utterly bad; then she was more sinned against than sinning; then she had not sinned at all! You loved her so much, that, priest as you are, you deemed it no sin

to marry her. You would have sacrificed your soul to make her your wife, and now you calmly propose to give her to another man! Oh, mark me! I am rejoiced at this conclusion. I will not pain you by inquiring how you arrived at it. I only beg an assurance that it is a conclusion and not the step (as its predecessors have been) to some—well, to something else.”

“It is irrevocable—final. If what I have done has not made it so, what I will yet do, shall satisfy.”

“Spoken like a man,” said Flowers, warmly; “now you will be yourself again.”

Owen smiled, “I have to thank you,” he said, “for making this easier to me than I expected, but one thing I must say, though you are kind enough not to ask the causes of this change, there is not one which touches the character of Miss Herbert, or diminishes

the affection I have for her. It is because I love her, that I set her free. Can you understand me?"

"Hardly; but I believe you. One has to believe many things one cannot understand."

"You never loved."

"Never."

"Because your vows"—

"Oh! my vows have sat lightly on me in many ways," Flowers interrupted with a short laugh. "What is a vow! A promise to do something which we think we can do. Suppose, not having ever seen the Thames at London, or knowing what it was like, I were ordered to swear I would jump over it? Am I a perjurer? The sin is on those who set me an *impossibility*. There are vows and vows. My vow of chastity has never been tried; had it been, I would have killed myself I think, rather than break it. Vow, or no vow

the mere reflection that I had been subdued by a woman would be too humiliating to bear. You frown! My dear Owen, in the lives of men like you and me, women have no place. We do not want a drudge (legally installed) to cook and scrub for us whilst we are away at our work; or a doll to wear the family's diamonds, and give us an heir. Women are inferior creatures, powerful chiefly for mischief. They are useful now and then as tools, that's all. When you have done with them for your own purposes; put them by. When you don't want them, and they are not employed against you; leave them alone. That is the only safe rule for us. One of the greatest mistakes committed by my old Church was admitting women into religious orders. They have cherished and propagated the disease that is destroying it. They have always used their influence against those who

are capable of administering the cure. Popes, priests, statesmen, have had their hands tied in bonds, spun of bigotry and intolerance, by a lot of ignorant women, and the fools they control in every household."

"What place would you give women in the Church?"

"No place at all—in *mine*. In what you call yours, they don't do much harm, as they oppose each other. Your Low Church woman pulls one way, and your High Church woman pulls another, and your Broad Church woman looks on and laughs. If some of your bishops, or the leader of some political party, is afraid of one of these sets; other bishops, and other statesmen are afraid of the rest."

"And all do good in their way," Owen added, "you have noted the humanising influences of lady visitors in my poor parish."

"I have," Flowers replied grimly, "and

summed up the results of an average day's visiting, by the average visitor. Say she makes six calls—

“At house No. 1 she is affronted.

“At house No. 2 she gives offence.

“At house No. 3 she does good and establishes sympathy.

“At house No. 4	} she is toadied for what she can give.”
„ „ No. 5	
„ „ No. 6	

“You are not quite fair I think,” said Owen with a smile and rising to end a discussion which was distasteful to him, “but even one case in six of sympathy”—

“The teacher demands *obedience*, not sympathy,” Flowers interrupted, “and in my Church he shall have it. He will offer no bribes, but issue orders. He will give us no offence, and woe to those who affront him. Good-night. How late it is! If I were

you, Owen, I'd not go back to work at once. Give yourself a short holiday, you need it. Why not go to Brighton for two or three days. It would do you good."

"To the sea?" Owen replied, "yes, I think the sea would do me good. Perhaps I will go on the 25th."

"Better leave it so," he thought, when the other had left. "I am sorry now that I told the Marshalls."

CHAPTER V.

FIRST BLOOD.

It is the 23rd day of October. To-morrow all the guests assembled at Hadlow Hall will depart, and the next day their whilom host and hostess will become visitors in their turn. My lord is going north to pass some days with his political chief; my lady is due south, at the house of that very Marchioness whom she threw so heavily, as narrated in a previous chapter. They have never actually quarrelled—they are too well bred for that—and the exigencies of society throw them together. You see, you must have certain people at your house just as you must have certain things at your table. You may not like venison, and champagne

may disagree with you; nevertheless you must have a haunch now and then when it is in season, and open the wine for others. So you may dislike Lady A., despise Colonel B., and be horribly jealous of Mrs. C., but when they are in season you must invite them, or the great world will say you had nobody. Lady Pem was in season; that is to say "the fashion," and had to be put *at* the table exactly as the pheasants had to be put *on* it.

Just in time to dress for dinner on the 23rd, arrived a gentleman who was to accompany Lord Pembury to the councils of his chief, a gentleman connected with the great firm of Parliamentary lawyers who pulled strings for the Conservative party. Lady Pem found him standing on the hearth rug with her lord, and did not like his looks. He was very much "displayed." He spoke loudly. He gave you the idea of a man who

was posing before an audience, and saying "Here I am in the house of a lord, and I'm going to take a countess down to dinner." For Pembury had whispered to his wife, "I want you to let Bradley take you down, as he is a stranger; and be civil to him, won't you? He's a useful man to us."

"This is not the first time I have had the pleasure of seeing your ladyship," remarked the favoured one as they left the room.

"Indeed!" said Lady Pem.

It was not a happy opening of a conversation. Thousands of people had seen her in the Park, at the opera, at fêtes, and fancy fairs. Perhaps this one had bought a moss rose of her for a guinea at some charity bazaar, and wanted to build a previous acquaintance on the transaction. So she made that "Indeed!" say "Well! and what if it isn't?" so clearly that the subject was

not pursued. She was civil to him however; avoided "shop" (which in his case was politics), and gave him the delightful sensation of being talked to about the great world, its sayings and its doings, as though he belonged to it.

Between whiles she looked at him, and wondered where she had seen that marble white face, with a mouth like a half-healed gash in it, before.

When the ladies had departed and the tobacco came in, Pembury took his wife's vacant chair, and whispered to this Mr. Bradley—

"Follow me to my study as soon as these men go, and we can have an hour or two without interruption." He said this as though he proposed a treat.

Bradley winced. He wanted to get back to the drawing-room and be introduced

perhaps to a professional beauty. What glory to be able to take a fellow-clerk into the park and be seen of him to bow to a lady whose photograph was in the shop windows ! Well, he could not refuse, and he had part of to-morrow before him. Much might be done at breakfast ; that would be some consolation for a night spent over electioneering dodges.

“You mustn’t mind my being dull to-night,” said the hostess a little later on ; “I’m so sorry to lose you all.”

“Dear Lady Pem,” gushes a pretty girl, going down sideways to a footstool at her feet, and taking her hand, “we’ve been so happy.”

She is rewarded with a kiss and a bright smile, which fades away quickly.

Lady Pem is not dull because she is going to lose her guests ; on the contrary, they

have bored her considerably of late, and she has been longing to be quit of them. She is miserable about Owen—*about* him, mind; not for him. There is now just one clear day between her and what she feels sure will be a dreadful scene. She has written suggesting a dozen different ways of getting out of the Tracy difficulty, without hurting Pearl. She has promised upon her word of honour to tell any number of falsehoods about it, and to stick to them for ever. She has implored him to think of his mother, and not subject her to certain shame and grief, for the chance of benefiting a girl of whom he may never hear again; who may, perhaps, be dead. She has pointed out that no one but Mrs. Tracy (who could be “managed”) and herself, have laid the forgeries on Pearl, and what a thousand pities it would be to drag her name up again.

“Besides,” she had argued, “you don’t seem to consider that you cannot clear the girl of the one charge, without admitting another which is worse. No one will believe that you didn’t get up the thing together.”

In the pauses of a song, in the rests of a dance, in the middle of a conversation, this subject breaks into her mind, like a burglar, and carries away with it all her pleasure. Sometimes she convinces herself that Owen must be reasonable, and this cheers her up until reflection shows that he may be depended upon for running counter to reason in all its forms. And this just as he had become a celebrity, and part of his light was shining upon her! Unconsciously she adopts Mr. Flowers’ views, and sighs for the days when Holy Church could (and would) have locked up such a man on bread and water for a year or two, till he came to his

senses, and promised not to disgrace his relations.

This is the sore point with Lady Pem. She knows that her lord will be furious. He had made but little fuss, as yet, about her having disregarded his orders to let the woman (meaning Pearl) alone, because he has (as he thinks) heard the last of her. Lady Pem shudders in anticipation of what he will say when he finds out that her disobedience has not even the thinnest gilding of success. She knows that he will use the dreadful "I told you so" with all the pitiless emphasis of a dull man who has a clever woman (of whose gifts he is jealous) delivered quick into his hand. He is the worst of all scolders—the nagging scold, who never forgets or forgives, who, once started, grinds out the whole gammut of his grievances until he runs down from sheer exhaustion. Set scolding

on one, he shunts off into others, treating them as though they had never been explained, or justified, or atoned for. And now this unlucky slip may start him! start him not into a sudden storm of anger, but a long miserable drizzle of abuse. She knows that he has been nursing a grievance against her ever since that irregular visit by Lord Longbow, and is waiting for an opportunity to vent it. Dangerous thoughts come out of this. "Poor dear Fred! If he had only been a year or two older when"—

Of all sad thoughts of tongue or pen
The saddest of all—it might have been.

She wished her friends good-night with a heart full of thankfulness that it was for the last time, and had just made herself comfortable for the usual hair-brushing when Lord Pembury entered the room, with an expression on his face which made his wife's

heart stop, throb, "*It's coming!*" and then beat fast, with a sickening sense of fear. She felt that there was a storm in the air this time, and no drizzle.

"You can go," he said to the maid. "Do you hear me?" he continued in a louder voice, as the woman stood irresolute.

"Williams is accustomed to take her orders from me," said Lady Pem; "that is the usual way, I think. I do not remember you ever having spoken to her before, and she is perplexed. You can go Williams; give me the brushes. Won't you sit down?" (this to her lord).

She spoke slowly, making long pauses between the sentences to gain time. The first shock was over. If she could only get cool, and make him angry, she might have the best of it after all.

"No," he replied sharply, "what I have to

say won't take long. Leave off that"—(meaning the brushing which she was continuing with her own fair hands), "and attend to me."

"Thank you, I can always listen so much better when I am brushing my hair," she said; "dear me, how it is falling off. Would you much mind if I had to have it cut short like a boy's?—like—like"—

"Longbow's—for example," he muttered, through clenched teeth.

My lady had her head bent forward, and the lovely rippling gold spread like a veil over her face. So its hot flush was hidden.

"So—o," she said to herself, "it's that!"

"Take your mind back to the day when you pretended to go to town about your brother," he continued.

"I would rather you left out the word *pretended*," she observed coolly. "It doesn't

sound nice, somehow; but go on. I remember the day I went to Owen—well?”

“You told me you had seen him and the Ranletts, but no other man.”

“I did.”

“I asked you in so many words if you had seen Lord Longbow, and you said ‘No.’”

“I did.”

“That was a lie.”

“It was.”

She tossed her hair aside as she spoke and looked him full in the face.

“You lunched together?”

“We did—and more than that, he saw me to the station, and travelled with me—as far as the junction.”

“And yet,” he cried, quivering with fury, “you told me you had not met.”

“Of course!”

I hope he did not mean to strike her. When

anger pulls the strings we are thrown about wildly. It might have been a gesture of contempt, detestation, any bad passion you please—which he could not control. Perhaps he only intended to fling himself from her. Whatever the cause, the effect was unmistakable. Lady Pem received what at school we used to call a “back-hander” on the mouth.

She gave one short sharp cry—more of surprise, I fancy, than pain. She was a thoroughbred, and could bear pain. She was a gentlewoman outraged vulgarly, and had to pull herself together to resent it. Drops of blood came, but no tears.

“I thought,” she said, pressing a handkerchief to her lips, and looking at the crimson stains, “that it was only tinkers and tramps who did this sort of thing.”

The sight of the blood shocked him into comparative calmness.

"I did not mean to hurt you," he replied. "You goaded me to frenzy with your infernal coolness. Do you think you can look a man in the face and tell him you have lied to him—and on such a subject! My God! and expect him to keep his temper, and know what he's doing."

"I expect every person claiming to be a gentleman to know what he is doing in my presence," was Lady Pem's haughty answer.

"A husband's injured honour"—

"Bah! Your honour is safe in *mine*—as yet."

He was beginning to curse (mentally) his ill luck that had given her a grievance, and to feel that his advantage was slipping away from him, but this interruption stung him back to it.

"How can I believe anything you say when you admit having lied to me," he said.

“A lie,” she replied, “is the natural resort of the weak. The truth is not good enough for men like you. You always disbelieve me about—about any man you are jealous of. If I had told you I met Longbow by the merest chance—as is the fact—it would have been all the same. You would have made one of these delightful scenes. You would have taunted me with having made an assignation with him in the same elegant language you used once before when he came to pay me a visit. Well, as this is your usual course I have to protect myself. I would like to be truthful if you would let me, but as I am sure to suffer for being so, I prefer to take the chance of escape by what you pleasantly call ‘lying.’”

“And be found out?”

“One has to run some risk” (with a shrug). “I presume that you got your in-

formation from Mr. —, what is his name? the man with the cold cream face. Yes, I thought so. Now as I am in for it let me tell you (and you can believe me or not, just as you please) all that happened."

She began by a full confession of the Tracy incident, which I need not repeat, and then went on—

"Owen, upon whom I had counted to take charge of me for the rest of the day, was thus incapacitated. It would have been a cruelty to ask him. I was on my way to my milliner's when I met Longbow, I was faint and hungry. What could I—a woman alone in London—do? I asked him to give me some luncheon, and he did. We went to the Burlington (you have taken me there yourself), and had it in the public room in presence of a dozen people, your informant (whom I now remember to have observed

staring at me) included. I can account for every five minutes of that day. We left the Burlington just in time to catch the train home, and as it started I became quite ill from all the worry I had gone through. Longbow, seeing I was suffering, jumped into the carriage, and the next moment we were off."

"And you travelled alone with him for twenty miles?"

"Better with him than a fit of hysterics. If one of your pets had seen me so, she would probably have told you that I was tipsy again. Longbow cheered me up, and we had quite a pleasant journey. You ought to say you are much obliged to him instead of beating me."

"Beat you!" he sneered, "I suppose you imagine you've got the"—he was going to say "the whip hand of me," but this was too

near the truth, so he substituted—"a grievance there. Make the most of it."

"I am considering on the contrary," she said, looking at her swelled lip in the glass, "how to hide it."

"Get a piece of ice for it now, and think of a lie to use in the morning," her husband retorted brutally.

"Perhaps a piece of sticking plaster will do as well," she replied, "but I am much obliged to you for the prescription."

"So easily made up, isn't it?"

"That is a most ungenerous taunt, when you know that if I had to excuse this mark by a falsehood, it would be to save you. You're not good at this sort of thing, Charlie. Heavy bullying when we are alone, and saying spiteful things before company, when I can't answer, are your strong points. You'd better stick to them. Oh! this is

quite disinterested advice. Unless you disfigure me, or break some of my bones, I prefer your hand to your tongue. If upon these occasions you would strike me and go; it would be quite a relief—like having a tooth out, you know, instead of bearing the toothache.”

He stood like a whipped dog, and she had some compassion for him.

“Now then,” she went on, “wish me good-night, and say you are sorry you struck me.”

“I have said I did not mean to strike you,” he replied, sulkily.

“Charlie” (more kindly still, and laying her hand on his arm), “say you are sorry I am hurt.”

“You brought it on yourself,” he growled.

“That is enough. Concession is thrown away upon you. It is nearly two o’clock, Lord Pembury, and I wish to be alone.”

The enemy retired sullenly firing some parting shots to the effect that she had not heard the last of it, to which she made no reply. Then she opened her dressing-case and took a dose of the fashionable nepenthe. From the same receptacle she drew a photograph, and, tired as she was, sat and mused over it for another half-hour.

“He looks so young,” she exclaimed, “such a boy !”

CHAPTER VI.

LADY PEM IS "GOOD."

"I WILL see no one but my brother," Lady Pem told the butler, as she entered her London house on the 25th, "and to all inquiries as to how long I am to remain in town, you will say that you have no instructions."

Owen arrived shortly afterwards, and found her in her sanctum which had shed its holidays in honour of this flying visit, and others which were to follow.

"Now," she began, patting his hand, "you are going to be a good sensible boy, and do exactly what your wise old sister bids you. There! don't look so wretched. It was horribly wicked of course, but, after all,

you know it wasn't exactly *you*. And now you're quite a different person, in the Church and good, and have repented, and all that, so really there is very little to be said."

"But much to be done."

"Yes, and that you must leave to me. Now you tell me the Ranletts knew all this before, so that no one is the wiser but myself, and I will be as silent as the grave."

"You forget the Tracys and my poor mother."

"Oh, didn't I tell you? The happiest thing!" exclaimed his sister. "I wrote to mamma on my return from that unlucky visit, and was so agitated I hardly knew what I was about. I really thought I gave the letter with some others to Williams to put into the bag, but it fell behind my davenport and was only found yesterday, when I was packing up. Wasn't that lucky! So we

have no one to fear but the Tracys, the man wants to go to Parliament in Pembury's old seat—I can manage that. The woman wants to get into society—I can manage that also. I will let them think you were partly to blame for the letters, and put it that for *my* sake nothing is to be said about them. How stupid of you to put the address! if you hadn't done so I could easily have made out that it was some other Tracys. Why did you hit upon them of all people?"

"I opened a directory at random," Owen replied, "and took the first name I saw."

"You should have invented a name, and an address too," sighed his sister.

"I was afraid lest some one else might look into the directory."

"Ah!" said my lady, brightening up, "and so we did, now I remember. It wasn't so stupid after all."

The observer could have found a curious psychological puzzle on the effort of this confession of vileness. It humiliated the man, but comforted the woman. It reminded him that he had been a villain—it assured her that he was not a fool.

“I must not hear you take that tone, Claire,” he replied, gravely. “Nor can I allow you to relieve me of blame by throwing any on Pearl. Let that be clearly understood. It is an immense relief—immense! to know that poor dear mother will not suffer—I mean *need* not, if you keep good faith with me.”

“It was quite providential my mislaying the letter—wasn’t it?” said Lady Pem, piously, raising her beautiful eyes.

This jarred; for the Rev. Owen Hilyar was not of those divines who charge all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune to

Providence, or credit it with every change and chance. He was not in his Maker's confidence, and spared not such as pretend to have a reading order of admission to Heaven's chancery. So he gave his sister to understand that if Providence had pleased to interpose, it would have done so by checking her unwomanly and unchristian persecution of Pearl, out of which this particular trouble had sprung. He spoke in the soft low voice he used for reproof, and which smote so heavily when it fell on conscious guilt. Not a word for himself, not a tinge of reproach for the misery his sister's interference had caused him. All for sweet Charity.

"You make me feel quite guilty," she said, wiping away some tears when he had done, "and it's hardly fair, considering that I did it all for your sake, and am going to take up those horrid people to stop their mouths."

"I hate the idea," Owen broke out, with bitterness, "and but for Pearl's sake I would not permit it."

"Has anything been heard of her?" asked Lady Pem, glad to change the subject.

"I presume so by this time."

"*Presume?* you haven't asked!"

"No. I am schooling myself to forget." Then he told her all about the search, the finding of the Dyson-Kemp letter, and the construction put upon it by Judge Ranlett. "It passes my comprehension," he said, "why they should have thought it worth while to get up this elaborate but clumsy deception. They should at least have invented some motive for the foul play they suggest. It is just a contrivance to throw dust into my eyes, and keep up the plot until" —

"Yes! until?"

"Until they are assured that I am quite

out of their way."—"Until I am gone," was on his lips.

"Does Flowers know all about this?" asked Lady Pem.

"Almost all."

"I have not a very high opinion of his judgment, but—for curiosity sake—what does he say?"

"He speaks with distorted mind. Just and liberal in most things, he is the veriest bigot where a woman is concerned. His suspicions are insulting, and I would rather not mention them."

"But if we *know* they are unfounded," Lady Pem pleaded, she was getting very curious, "there can be no harm."

"There can be," Owen said with firmness, "and there *is*. Half the scandals that disgrace our time get launched in this way. They were told with indignant disbelief, re-

peated without it, and then pass current as though to be believed in."

"You will make me think it is something very bad."

"It is. Bad to have imagined, bad to have put into words; foolishly bad, because there is no reason or probability in it."

"Then why not tell me?" coaxed his sister. "I won't repeat it. Besides I could contradict it if I heard it elsewhere."

"When she comes back, and marries René Ranlett, it will need no contradiction," Owen replied, decisively. "Now I must go."

"Oh! you will stay to luncheon?"

"I cannot. I have much to do to-day."

"How unkind! And I all alone!"

"Dear Claire, I cannot."

"I think you might have given me this one day when—when I—want you so. Do stay, Owen. You don't know how much I

want you. You may be sorry for it if you leave me all alone," she threw her arms around his neck, and clung to him and cried.

"Dear old sister," he tenderly said, "I was afraid that your pomps and vanities had got between us of late years, but you *do* love me. Well, then, believe that I cannot possibly do as you wish. Why, what could be happier than a long talk with you over old times? I'd give up everything that could be postponed for that. There, don't cry, and now, when for a little time we are brother and sister again, will you promise me that if our mother has to know what I have done, you will help me all you can. You must tell her, out of your knowledge of this world, how utterly selfish men are. How that in the indulgence of a cruel passion they will ignore

the first dictates of truth and honour, or invent a miserable creed to silence them. How that one who would deem himself disgraced for ever if he cheated at a game, will play with a woman for her honour with marked cards and loaded dice. Let her know that the more innocent the victim marked out for destruction may be, the easier, will she be destroyed. And so lay all the blame on me, make her think of Pearl as though I had kept my word to her, that I had died years ago, and she is my widow. Will you do this for me, dear sister?"

"Of course I'll do my best for you," replied Lady Pem, somewhat petulantly, "but it is ridiculous talking like this now. One would imagine from your long face that this important business you pretend to have were going away to die. Trust to me, and don't be absurd."

"I will trust you," he said, and then having kissed her (as she thought), with unnecessary warmth—they parted.

Well, she had got over it better than she expected, and at the cost of only one falsehood, but that was what we called at school a "whopper."

The letter to her mother about Pearl had gone, and been "hedged" adroitly.

Lady Hilyar was given to understand that this *eclaircissement* had broken off the marriage, but—as this had once been *on*, it would be ruinous to dear Owen to let people know he could ever have been engaged to such a creature. Nothing, therefore, was to be said, not even to him, as his feelings were dreadfully hurt, and any reference to the subject distressed him. To this a satisfactory reply had been received; so that now if Owen could only be kept quiet, and the Tracys

would bite (which they were pretty sure to do), all was well—so far.

But there was Longbow! She had told him he might call. He most certainly would do so, and find himself included in the general order—"not at home." Poor Fred!

Towards the end of her solitary luncheon she asked if any one had called, and the answer was—Lord Longbow. Whenever she felt at the sticking plaster on her lip—as one will feel at a sore place—she sighed and thought, "Poor Fred!"

She had intended to admit him and subdue her lord's jealousy by open defiance—"bluff" in fact. This idea held whilst the physical pain of the blow she had received lasted.

When this passed away, and the other ache—the heartache—came, a change set in that frightened her. She found she could no

longer think of "poor Fred" as a boy with whom she had played. The outrage her husband had inflicted set him up suddenly, as a man who loved her. She remembered how his eyes had dimmed, and his voice had faltered as he called her "my poor darling" in the railway carriage, and how a shudder had passed through him as she tapped him on the cheek and said, "Silly boy!"

She had done so as coolly as though he had been the little Fred of twelve years ago, but she felt she could never do so again. During that pretended nap she had watched him out of the corner of one eye, and noted the deep, yearning worship which lit up his handsome face.

The photograph which made him appear so uncomfortably boyish, had not that look. There was a mature manhood of passionate

love in it, which glorified the other picture which was forming on her heart.

If he were to come now and kiss her hand, and look into her face in that way—what should she do? She felt herself trembling almost as he had trembled, when she thought of it.

So she resolved to be good—that is to say not to “bluff,” for even with these thoughts tingling through her, she would not admit she was afraid of Longbow or of herself. She might have to scold him severely—poor fellow! and send him away for a long time, and that would be sad—

“Be good”—we tell the children—“and you will be happy.”

Lady Pem was being good, and found it (as the Judge would say) “mighty dull.” In a pile of society papers she took no delight. To look out of the window was to realize

Belgravian dosolation ! Even the regular crossing sweeper was out of town—probably at Margate with his family.

A four-wheeler full of luggage crawled along. Every shutter but her own was closed. The winter-stricken trees in the square looked as though they would never have the heart to get green again. The skies were leaden, and the earth slimy with last night's fog.

On one side of the street stood a policeman, pondering perhaps on the iniquity of board wages ; and on the other sauntered a man in a brown ulster, with comforter muffled round his face and throat—a man who might have been an invalid ordered to take half an hour's exercise in the sun—if he could find it.

From this prospect Lady Pem turned with a sigh. There was nothing between now and bedtime but a visit to her dressmaker's for a

final trying on of the violet velvet's successor. This would kill an hour or two, but afterwards! What next, and next?

How was the long evening to die? If Owen had not been so ridiculous they might have done a play, come home to supper and been quite cheerful.

The brougham was to be round at four o'clock, and four o'clock did come at last.

As Lady Pem passed the top of St. James' Street she looked with interest at the spot where she had nearly run over Lord Longbow, as though possibly he might be there again. She glanced up at the windows of one of his clubs, and drew it blank. She wondered what "poor Fred" was doing—whether he too was being good.

At the dressmaker's she encountered a certain Mrs. Chevington, a lady who had been at her parties (the big ones), and at

whose house she had received entertainments ; but who was not quite in her set. As drowning people are said to catch at straws, so will lonely ones cling to slight acquaintances. To her surprise and delight Mrs. Chevington found herself called "dear," and kissed by the great Lady Pem, and thereupon insisted upon carrying her home to tea. Just as they were leaving an unpleasantness arose between a good-looking chestnut in a hansom and his driver. The man licked the horse, and the horse licked the cab, and the fare inside, finding that the latter was giving in (in one sense of the word) jumped out, evincing great alacrity though encumbered with a brown ulster. Now this garment belonged to a period when you couldn't have too many pockets and tabs, and buttons, and belts, and things, and was therefore remarkable in these more simple days.

When the ladies arrived at their journey's end (which was in St. George's Road) Mrs. Chevington found an envelope and a card on the hall slab.

"How lucky!" she exclaimed as she opened the one, and "*In-deed!*" when she glanced at the other. "There *is* some one else in town, dear, after all," she told Lady Pem, as they mounted the stair. "See," and she handed her the card. It was engraved *The Earl of Longbow.*

CHAPTER VII.


KISMET !

"I MET your husband in the city, Mrs. Chevington," Lord Longbow began, "and he told me you were in town and might perhaps take pity upon a miserable wretch, who"—here he saw Lady Pem, and stuck. Lady Pem had had time to pull herself together on the landing, and was equal to the situation.

"Why, Fred!" she said, "what brings you to town in October? I thought you were shooting somewhere."

The strain was further relieved by Mrs. Chevington, who had an idea, and burned to deliver it.

"Look here," she began, almost before Lady Pem had finished. "The 'Regency' opens to-night with a new piece



and they've sent me a box; they always do. Now you must both of you dine here and go with us."

After a little faint demur on Lady Pem's part the proposal was accepted. She was to send for her maid and what she required for evening array, and Longbow was to go to his rooms and dress, and be back again as soon as he could. Lady Pem was to write her orders at once, and Mrs. Chevington would go and see about having dinner put forward an hour.

So Lady Pem and "poor Fred" were left alone for the inevitable explanation.

"Yes, I know I said you might call," she replied to his first demand, "but it wouldn't do. Indeed, indeed, Fred, I didn't *dare*. Pembury found out we had lunched together that day, and there was an awful scene. I haven't recovered from it yet."

“You are looking pale and ill, my poor Claire,” he said, “and what ails your lip?”

“A pimple, and I *would* bite it. Now look here, Fred, you mustn’t come to-night. Send back an excuse when you go to dress. Some one would see us—there always is some idiot to see me and tell—and I should have to go through another storm of abuse. For *my* sake, dear Fred, don’t risk it.”

“Did he—did Pembury know we travelled together?”

“Yes, I told him so myself after”—

“After what?”

“After a person named Bradley had said he saw us at the Burlington. It’s best to tell it all when you’re found out.”

“Do you remember?” Fred asked, in a voice that faltered as he went on, “telling me as we were crossing the river, that if your

husband found us out you thought he would beat you—did he?"

"As if people in our rank of life *beat* each other!" replied Lady Pem, haughtily.

"Some of them do baser things still, if I am not mistaken," he said. "Tell me what happened afterwards. Did you make it up?"

"No, because I got the best of it. When he is in the wrong he never makes it up. He waits till I do, or say something that he can catch hold of, and then he rakes it all out again. But never mind this—*please*, Fred, say you will not go to the theatre to-night. He is sure to hear of it if you do."

Lord Longbow had risen, had drawn one of the blinds aside, and was looking out into the lighted street.

"Suppose the mischief is done already?" he asked, "suppose he were to be told we are here?"

"Nothing on earth," she replied, clasping her hands, "would persuade him that we met by accident, and we did, Fred, you know that."

"I had no more idea of your coming here than I had of finding Jumbo when I called, and yet, as you say, he will swear the meeting was prearranged."

"Ah, but there is no one here to tell, whereas at a theatre"—

"Claire, dear, listen. I said just now that there are men in our rank of life who do baser things than beat their wives. They set dogs at them."

"What *can* you mean?"

"When I called at your house this afternoon I saw lounging about a man whom I knew to be a private detective. About an hour afterwards I passed again in the hope of seeing you and he was there still. I didn't

think anything of it till just now when—God knows why—a suspicion struck me. Come here. Do you see that man?”

Lady Pem came, and saw, and gave a little scream. She saw the man who wore an old-fashioned brown ulster, and he was the individual who had walked so feebly round the square railings in the morning, and skipped so lightly out of the hansom in the afternoon.

“I am watched!” she gasped.

“It looks like it.”

“I see what you mean by ‘setting dogs at one,’” said Lady Pem, her breath quickening.

“That man followed me to Madame Estelle’s. I saw him in a cab; and now he is watching this house.”

“As he came following you,” said Longbow, “he cannot know that I am here. It is you who must make some excuse not to go

to the theatre. Whilst he is following you home, I can leave unnoticed."

"I will make no excuse," she exclaimed with increasing indignation.

"Think, Claire, think well," Longbow whispered. "If you and Pembury have to break, don't let him do it."

"Dogged by a detective," she went on under a full head of anger. "And of course he must know why. What reason but one can a man have to set a spy upon his wife? And this man who calls himself my husband has talked about me to a thief-taker, a low wretch who may get tipsy in some public-house, and brag of what he has done. And so servants will get hold of it—I know what servants are. My own Williams has told me things that—great God! they will point at me in the street, and send spiteful paragraphs

to those wretched papers. I shall be disgraced for ever."

"No, darling," Fred whispered, "the disgrace is his. Be guided by me. Let him have the disgrace of having set this spy, and the extra humiliation of being found out himself without gaining a point."

"It would sting!" she cried. "Good boy! I'll do it; but not by shirking. No, no; that's not the way. We'll not change our plans for him. When you go out, look that fellow full in the face. Perhaps he will follow you, and come back. I hope he will. Only I'll be beforehand with him and the clever creature that hounds him on. You are right, Fred, it will hurt him—the plodding pompous fool! To treat me thus! *me!* who made him!" (when the anger is in the grammar often gets out). "Why, if he hadn't been born a peer he would now be a

clerk in some third-rate Government office, at the wages of a butler ! That is the sort of thing he is made for. And he dares to treat me like this—the coward ! Fred, I deceived you ; he did beat me—he struck me in the face, here, on my lip. For very self-shame I told you a falsehood. I could not bear you to know I had fallen so low in any man’s eyes that he could beat me.”

“ The brute ! ”

“ We were alone, and he is a brute when he gets in a rage. I could have stood the blow, but for him to go in cold blood to a thief-taker about me—his wife. Fred, I used to wish, more than *wish* once, used to long for something in the first years of our married life when nothing was too good for me, and no caress too long or too tender. Women like myself told me I was foolish, for it would be a pain and a hindrance,

but I kept on wishing for his sake, till he got tired of me. Oh! how glad I am that my wish was not granted. Now he wants to get rid of me; wants evidence for a divorce! Oh, I know; and if that silly judge who tries divorces knew we were here together he'd grant one. They wouldn't even hear us, you know. And I had determined to be good, badly as he had behaved. I thought that when I forgave him for striking me, he would be sorry and treat me kindly for a long, long while. And so I refused to see you because you—oh, Fred! of course, I can't help knowing that you care for me, and you will be so"—(she could not get out the accustomed word). "You *will* look at me so! And I asked you not to come to the theatre because I wanted to keep it up—being good, you know. And he has chosen this very day" (she went on gulping down

the sob which was threatening to drown her anger in tears) "to have me watched. He shall see! You want me to let you shirk this man outside. You shall not. I am going to take my bull of Bashan by the horns. Why do you stare so at my lip? Do you want to kiss it and make it well, as we used to do when we hurt ourselves years ago?"

This was a risky speech, but sometimes the risky thing is the safe thing. Lord Pembury had not belied "poor Fred." The boy was anything but a Joseph, and there were female members of the Potiphar family who pulled caps for him. He had made some havoc in more respectable households, and seldom troubled himself to consider more than the pleasures of the moment in his ordinary amours. But this was not an ordinary amour. He loved Claire—she had

been his playmate, and he was a gentleman. He was being torn to pieces by wild thoughts. Passion and honour were playing the tug-of-war with his heart strings for the rope. A sigh, a tear, a sorrowful look would have turned the scale. Lady Pem knew how to steady it.

"No," he replied in a low hoarse voice, "I do not want it to get well."

"How unkind!" said her lips in a bantering tone. "Now I must really see about dressing, and" (here she raised her voice for she heard some one at the door) "and telegraph to my husband."

"What's that about telegraphing?" asked Mrs. Chevington as she entered the room.

"Do you want some forms?"

The forms were produced, and Lady Pem repeated her message aloud, word for word as she wrote it.

“Am—enjoying—myself—more—than—I—expected. Met—Fred—we—dine—together—with—the—Chevingtons—and—go—to—the—theatre—afterwards. He—will—see—me—off—to-morrow.”

“There! that will reach him just before dinner, and be as good as sherry and bitters. I must sign it though, mustn’t I?”

She did more than sign it. She hastily added one line (which she did not repeat) thus—

“This is in anticipation of news you expect from another quarter.”

“Fred will send it, won’t you, Fred? as Mrs. Chevington’s servants must be busy; and here is half a crown. No—I insist I want this message to be *all mine*; you are not to alter one word, mind! not one. Send it exactly as I have written it. If I knew

how, I'd go to the office and telegraph it myself."

"By Jove!" mused "poor Fred" as he left, "she *has* taken the bull by the horns. The question is, can she hold him?"

He passed the man in the brown ulster with a careless nod, and then stopped.

"Oh, by the bye," he said, "you needn't wait; better go and get your dinner. We are going to the *Regency* Theatre. You'll find us all there at half-past eight."

The man stammered something about mistake, and was taken up short.

"Not a bit of it! I knew you before you were dismissed from the police. Don't you remember that Welsher I had to thrash at Epsom in Parole's year? You are Compton and Co., Private Inquiry Office, and your name is Dax. You are employed by Lord Pembury, and one of your duties is to keep

an eye on me. Well, I'm going home to dress for dinner at Mrs. Chevington's. I shall be back in half an hour; but really, there is no necessity for you to wait. You are looking at that cab. It contains Lady Pembury's maid, and an evening dress to wear at the theatre. Sorry I cannot give you the number of our box, but you are sure to see us. Don't waste your time here, Dax, and go early or you won't get a seat. It's the opening night, you know."

"No yer don't!" growled Mr. Dax, when a passing hansom had carried Longbow off. "Yer ain't arf as clever as you thinks. Yer wornt to put me off the scent, but yer don't."

So he waited and saw the Earl come back in full dress—mystic, wonderful! and followed the party of four to the theatre, and couldn't find standing room, much less a seat. He followed them from the theatre,

saw Longbow dropped at his chambers and Lady Pembury at her house, and was perplexed. What the—(dickens will do) did that young swell mean by telling him the truth?

“I did not know,” Mrs. Chervington observed to her lord, “that the Pemburys were on such good terms. Wasn’t it nice of her to telegraph him that she was enjoying herself, and going to the theatre with us.”

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLUE.

THE 25th October was the day on which an answer to the second advertisement in the *Times* about Pearl (and Mab's ring) might be expected ; but nothing appeared. This disappointment, however, was compensated by an unlooked-for discovery. The cab-driver who had taken Pearl to Martin's Place called on the Marshalls in a high state of excitement, and told them he had seen the man who took her portmanteau, and that he was not a porter at all, but a " dresser " attached to one of the great hospitals.

His story—which was too long to set down here verbatim—came to this. A " pal " whose " good lady " was down with her fifth,

had come to grief with an omnibus, and was badly hurt. His (the narrator's) "old woman" got him to go to the hospital and see how the injured man was getting on, for the consolation of his anxious spouse; and there, putting bandages on his "'ed," was the very man! Dressed differently? Oh, yes; but he (cabby) would swear to him out of a thousand. He was knocked "all of a 'eeep" at the first look.

Inquiries which were immediately made proved that this statement was not as unreasonable as it at first appeared to be. Mr. Edgar Ripley, the "dresser" in question, did not bear a good character. He was a duly qualified surgeon, had been in practice and driven his brougham, had got into trouble, and passed some years ago as doctor on board certain mail packets plying to the West Indies and the Spanish main; had got

into trouble again and sunk to be a "dresser"—and by no means a popular one—in the hospital where Bill Bates, the faithful cabby, "spotted" him. Much of this information was obtained from the hall porter, by whom he was not held in high esteem, and who volunteered moreover "that he" (Mr. Ripley) "had better mind what he was after, for though his uncle *was* a governor, he would get the sack if he went on as he was a doing."

"What was he doing?"

"Well, coming late, and going early; and saucing his betters—that was what he was a doing—borrowing money, right and left from a sixpence up, to buy gin on the strength of his uncle the governor, and never paying; though lately he had come out in fine clothes and a watch and chain and stood lunches to the students as grand as you please." The

climax was to come. This shady person lodged not a hundred yards from the east end of Martin's Place.

Having ascertained when he was most likely to be found at home, Judge Ranlett and George Marshall called upon him, leaving René and Bill Bates outside within hailing distance.

Mr. Edgar Ripley occupied two seedy rooms on the ground floor of a small shabby house, communicating with each other by folding doors, and containing an atmosphere in which the ghosts of departed gin and the fumes of stale tobacco appeared to struggle for the preponderance. He was dressing in his bed-chamber, when these visitors arrived, and being told that two gentlemen wished to see him, he hastily closed the doors and said "All right—show them in." He was evidently expecting some one, for a moment

or two later he shouted, "Please sit down. You're before your time, I won't be long."

They sat down, and the Judge took a good look round him. A man's surroundings will sometimes give a clue to his character. Here was disorder and recklessness—disorder all over, recklessness in the treatment of some valuable surgical instruments which had been tossed into a corner for the rust and the dust to destroy. On a corner of the table (from which some books and papers had been swept to the floor) stood a penny ink bottle, with a steel pen standing in it, and on the mantelpiece, placed prominently, so as not to be forgotten, was a letter directed to *J. H. Fullerton, Esq., Post Office, Charing Cross (to be called for)*. The Judge put on his glasses and read that address, word by word, a dozen times. It seemed to have some fascination for him. Then he took up some of the

books from the floor and looked at the fly leaves, on which the owner had written his name. One of them was an old note book of clinical lectures, which Mr. Ripley had attended in his student days.

The folding doors were thrown open, and Mr. Ripley himself appeared, struggling into an overcoat and with a cheery "Now then" on his lips; but when he saw the strangers, his face changed, and his manner too.

"What the devil is the meaning of this intrusion?" he began. "I thought—why didn't you send in your names?"

"We were not asked to do so," the Judge replied. "We will not detain you long, Mr. Ripley. We are seeking some information which we think you can give us."

This seemed to relieve him, and changed surprise into bluster.

“In the first place, who are you? School Board people, or what?” he demanded.

“I am Judge Ranlett, of Chicago, and this gentleman is Mr. George Marshall, managing director of the Albert Glass and China Works. We want you to be good enough to tell us where we can find Miss Herbert.”

“Miss Herbert!”

“Miss Pearl Herbert, whose absence from home since the seventh of this month causes much anxiety to her friends.”

“But not, it seems, to her family,” said Ripley. “Is she any relation to either of you?”

“No.”

“Well then send me her father, or her brother, or her second cousin twice removed, and perhaps I’ll tell them that I know nothing about her. I won’t even say that much to you,” said Mr. Ripley, with a loud, vulgar laugh.

“Mr. Marshall is the lady’s partner in business, and has a right to make these inquiries,” the Judge replied. “He is informed that you met her in Martin’s Place on the day in question.”

“Who says so.”

“The cabman who drove her there. He says you carried her portmanteau, disguised as a porter. Would you like to see him? He is outside.”

“No,” shouted Ripley, “and the sooner you get outside too, the better. You must be mad. *I* carry portmanteaus! Do you know who I am?”

“We do,” the Judge replied calmly.

“Well then, if you are flats enough to believe such a story as that, you can. Your cabman says I was there; I say I was not—what next?”

“Next, we wish to inquire respecting Mr.

R. A. Kemp, a doctor, who is good enough to take interest in a poor patient named Hannah Dyson. Do you know him?"

"No."

"Indeed! I thought perhaps you had been at school together."

"Do you know where I was at school?"

"I do not."

"Then let me tell you," Ripley blurted, "that your observation is perfectly ridiculous."

"In my country," replied the Judge, "I find that those who have been at school together very often write alike. I have in my possession a letter from this R. A. Kemp, and the writing is singularly like the direction on that envelope" (Ripley snatched from the mantel-piece the epistle destined for Mr. Fullerton, and thrust it into the breast pocket of his coat) "and also to the notes in this

book which you seemed to have made not so long ago."

"How dare you come here badgering me, and prying into my books," cried Ripley, advancing on Ranlett with a threatening gesture. "You just hand over that book at once."

"Not quite at present I think."

"If you don't I'll send for a policeman."

"I really would not if I were you," said the Judge. "We can do without police—for the present—and so can you. Let us see how the case stands from my point of view. Mr. Kemp writes a letter to Miss Herbert, asking her to bring some clothes to a sick woman she used to know, and whom he is attending in Martin's Place."

"Well? and why not?"

"There is no such name in your Medical Directory as R. A. Kemp, and the woman he

mentions has been in her grave for over three years."

"No matter to me if she has," sneered Mr. Ripley.

"Miss Herbert obeyed the summons, and was met by a man dressed as a porter, who took her—somewhere."

"If she's that man's partner in business she must be a grown woman, and can go where she likes," was the comment.

"But having been drawn from her home under a false pretence, and not having been heard of since, it is probable that she did not go where she liked. Now, Mr. Ripley, I put this to you as a sensible man—suppose we were to find the writer of that letter, and he were the person our cabman swears he saw at the very place that letter names; don't you think there might be trouble? Suppose that man could be shown to have bought or bor-

rowed a suit of porter's clothes, and (which is very likely) he, not thinking it worth while to get rid of them, just threw them aside where if search were made they could be found—don't you think that he would be the biggest sort of fool if he were to talk *police*. Oh! I see, you begin to understand the position."

"You mean to say that this girl has gone off with me."

"Not at all. We feel quite sure you are not the principal in this matter, but only—excuse the expression—the tool."

"If I am, there's no crime in helping a woman to go on the spree if she wants to," said Ripley doggedly.

At the word "spree," George Marshall started up, and got as far as "Take that back, you blackguard, or"—when the Judge interposed.

"You had some previous knowledge of Miss Herbert?"

"Who hasn't? Didn't she figure in that lawsuit about poor Bob Downing's money, and didn't I know him like a book," jeered Mr. Ripley. "I know some one else too," he added after a pause, "and if you'll take my advice you'll leave her alone, or you'll get hold of something hot."

"Then you do know what has become of her?"

"Perhaps I do—perhaps I don't."

"Mr. Ripley, it might be made worth your while to know," said the Judge.

"Ah! how so?"

"Before we go to the police, we think of offering a reward for information about her."

"Good or bad?"

"We want the truth."

"How much will the reward be?"

“One hundred pounds.”

“She’d give twice that to have her secret kept.”

“We can get it for nothing through the police, Mr. Ripley. All we have to do is to give you into custody, as the last person seen in company with a lady who has disappeared, and then to excuse yourself you must speak.”

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” he replied, after some deliberation. “I will tell you where you can find out all about her, for a hundred pounds; if you” (turning to Marshall) “give me a cheque for four hundred more, to my order, payable three days’ after she discovers that I’ve told on her.”

“You might tell her yourself.”

“And kill the goose that lays the golden eggs—? not much! Finds out from *you* I mean.”

The Judge and Marshall put their heads together, and consulted.

“You cannot expect us to give you the money,” observed the former, “until we know that she really can be found where you say.”

“But you expect me to give you the clue before you hand over the money,” said Ripley, with his vulgar laugh. “Well, I’ll trust you. Leave me your cheque, payable this day week, and if I don’t keep faith with you, you can stop it. Can I say fairer than that?”

It was agreed that he could not. A draft was drawn on Marshall’s bankers, and a memorandum signed to the effect that if Miss Herbert ceased making certain payments to Mr. Ripley in consideration of information he should give respecting her; then a further sum of four hundred pounds should be paid

to him in consideration of such loss. This done Ripley put the papers in his pocket and said "Go to Paris, and ask for Mrs. Scott at the Hotel des Ambassadeurs in the Rue Jean Jacques Rousseau. She knows. Snap her up sharp, and she'll take fright and tell; but no writing or telegraphing, mind; go, one of you, and tackle her face to face, or she'll skip, and then I can't help you."

As they passed into the hall, accompanied by Mr. Ripley, the folding doors of his bedroom were opened slowly from the inside, and the leaden face of Mr. Flowers looked cautiously around. He had arrived during the above conversation and being (as it would appear) acquainted with the premises, had slipped into the back room. Perhaps he did not want to disturb Mr. Ripley and his visitors; perhaps he desired to hear what they had to say.

“The game is up,” Mr. Ripley mused, as his visitors left, “and scatter is the word for all in it.”

Then he re-entered his room and came face to face with Mr. Flowers.

CHAPTER IX.

IN A FOG.

WHILST Mr. Dax was wondering why that young swell (meaning Lord Longbow) had told him the truth, an emigrant ship, "The Bugle Horn," bound for Melbourne was being got ready for sea in the London Docks. All her passengers, save a few stragglers, were on board and she was to start on the top of the ebb tide which would make soon after midnight. Near the gangway, over which the emigrants had passed, stood the ship's doctor (Mr. Murray) and a first-class passenger whose ticket bore the name of Owen. These two had met before when the latter engaged his passage, and had "chummed" out of a mutual feeling that they could be agreeable to

each other during the long voyage that was before them. As they waited, watching the preparations made for warping out the ship, a man from the shore came hurriedly on board and asked to be shown her doctor. Murray stepped forward and was thus addressed,

“My name is Kemp, allow me to give you my card. I am a surgeon employed by the association which forwards some of your emigrants. Here also is the card of its chairman; you may know of him, being one of the governors of the St. Barnabas’ Hospital.”

Mr. Murray bowed.

“I have come to trouble you about a woman who is now being carried on board.”

“*Carried* on board!”

“Yes, there is the trouble. I have been at this work myself, and know how particular you are about receiving any one who may be suffering from contagious disease. There

is nothing of the sort, though, here. She has been having too much, 'good-bye,' you understand? From what I hear she has been drunk since this time yesterday."

"Has she a ticket?"

"Yes, and here it is. There are four other women of the same sort in the party. They took charge of her luggage, but I cannot find any of them."

Here the ship's bell began to ring out its first warning, and two men appeared carrying an ordinary police stretcher on which the form of a woman was huddled up, a sad spectacle!

"This is the person. You can judge for yourself. Faugh! one can smell the brandy a yard off."

A crushed bonnet all awry, and a mass of tangled, matted hair, hid her face. She wore what had once been a handsome black silk dress, but it was now torn and stained. One

boot was off and missing, and the stocking appeared black with dirt. Murray put aside her hair, and lifted one eyelid. Then he felt her pulse. The hand was soft, small, and shapely, but sadly in need of soap and water.

“Dead drunk” he observed.

“Exactly!” replied the other carelessly. “If you don’t mind, I’ll see her stowed away somewhere, where she can sleep it off. Perhaps I may find some of her friends.”

“All right” said the ship’s doctor, “as you’re in charge of her. Here Peterson! call one of the steerage stewards to show this gentleman below. This,” he continued to the passenger named Owen, when the wretched burden had been carried off, “is the sort they send out to make wives for colonists, and trust as nursery governesses to their children. Did you see her.”

“Hardly, I caught a glimpse and it was

enough—poor creature! What is to be done for her.”

“Nothing. Just let her sleep it off. She’ll be seasick in the morning, and then get all right.”

“It might have been sorrow that drove her to drink—sorrow at leaving her home and friends. She may not be so bad as you think.”

“If she had any friends, in your sense of the word, to leave, they would not have sent her off in that state. When I see a drunken woman with shabby finery and a soft hand, I know what to think,” said the doctor, “you don’t know this class.”

“I have had much experience with the poor.”

“My dear fellow, don’t you understand that this class don’t touch the poor. They wear silk and satin and drink champagne until they are flung a dirty heap on board an emigrant ship, or die in a workhouse infirmary.”

"I have visited workhouse infirmaries, and seen many sad sights in them," said Owen.

"The deuce you have! Curious fancy to take."

"I went on duty. I—I was once a Bible reader."

The last bell rang. "All strangers for the shore!" was sung out; and in a few minutes the ship gave her first heave of freedom.

"Well," replied Murray, "if the captain has no objection, I can find you plenty of work in that line."

"Will you really! I am so glad! It will be the greatest comfort to me to be doing some good. I have taken an interest already in that poor creature. How can we find out her name."

"It's on her ticket, of course. Here it is, *Hannah Dyson*."

"Hannah Dyson!" exclaimed the passenger whom the reader knows to be Owen Hilyar.

"Do you know her?" asked the doctor sharply.

"No, but a woman of that name—how old does she appear to be?"

"Here is all we know about her" (turning to the passenger list) "*Dyson Hannah*! single: female: servant, English."

"It is very strange! The Dyson I mean was a servant; but I was told she is dead."

"Well, you can see for yourself to-morrow."

"I should not know; I never saw her. A letter was written in her interests by a person named Kemp, and"—

"R. A. Kemp! why, that's the very man who brought her on board. Here's his card."

"Then it is she," said Owen, "and the

story of her death was another falsehood. Oh, how right I was ! ”

“ I don’t pretend to understand you, Mr. Owen,” said the doctor, “ and we don’t ask questions of passengers ; but you’ll excuse my saying after this, that you cannot see that woman till you satisfy me there’s nothing wrong between you.”

“ I give you my word of honour, doctor, that I never saw her in my life. This Mr. Kemp wrote to a certain lady in her name, saying she was ill and in want, and asking that lady to visit her. She went, and did not return to the friends with whom she had been staying. I have my own opinion why she thus absented herself. An attempt has been to force another upon me on the ground that this letter must be part of a plot against her, because Hannah Dyson is dead ! Now do you understand ? This is

not *all* the story ; but it is true, and all the truth so far as my interests are concerned. If she be the person I suppose, she can confirm my suspicions, and relieve me of some anxiety respecting that lady."

"Well, we'll see about it in the morning," replied Murray. "It's time to turn in now."

* * * * *

Next morning the doctor went his rounds, and then took Owen aside.

"Look here," he began, "I've seen that woman, and she—now have you really told me all you know about her?"

"I think so."

"I can't make her out."

"There is one thing perhaps I ought to mention," said Owen, "in case she may be deceiving you. She is not a truthful person. In that very letter I spoke of last night she admitted having sworn falsely at a trial."

"Hum—m. She hasn't spoken at all yet. She has no baggage on board, and no one knows her. It's the greatest puzzle *I* ever had set me."

"What to do with her?"

"No—what *has* been done with her. That's the question! Her breath this morning is as sweet as a baby's. She was no more drunk than you were last night. She was drugged."

"What for?" exclaimed Owen.

"What *with* is my puzzle," said the doctor. "It isn't opium in any form, or morphia in any form, or chloral in any form I know of, unless she has some constitutional idiosyncrasy which would obscure the usual symptoms. There is only one thing I can think of, and that—well, it's no use talking to you about it. You haven't studied poisons have you?"

“Good heavens! Do you think she has been poisoned?”

“I think there’s something very mysterious about her. That man who brought her on board lied, or was lied to about her condition. She was not drunk, and yet her dress stunk of stale liquor, and she looked as though she had been rolled in the gutter.”

“May I see her?”

“Not yet,” said the doctor. “I’ve got one of the other women to give her a bath. I’ve read somewhere that immersion in water—but never mind that now. It is needed anyhow, and I’ve borrowed some clean clothes; those she had on were in an awful state. I shall have her taken to a cabin, for it’s a case that requires careful treatment and quiet; of course I shall report it,” he added, with a sharp look in the other’s face.

“Shall we go to the captain now? I have

not the slightest objection to tell him what I know."

"Better wait till she can speak for herself. The bath will freshen her up."

By this time the ship was off Sheerness, and her tug had left her.

The wind, which had been light and baffling from the first, had fallen almost to a calm. The sea had just a ripple upon it, lit by a bright morning sun. Owen leaned over the bulwarks and thought how much he could tell the captain without hurting Pearl. He soon found that telling his story would be like the letting out of waters. The field would widen as he went on. One fact would have to be explained by another, and so forth, till all his misery and her wrongs might be brought out. If Hannah Dyson had been kidnapped and hustled insensible on board a ship bound for Australia, some one must be

interested in getting her out of the way. That was clear. Whom did he suspect? This would be one of the first questions put. Was it possible that the Ranletts would carry their deception so far as to do this lest their falsehood about her death should be discovered? Who would attack them for it if it were discovered? Not the Marshalls, for they were most likely in the secret. Not Pearl, for it was done in her interests. Most assuredly not himself, Owen Hilyar, for they all knew he was to leave the country on the very night the kidnapping (if kidnapping it were) was perpetrated. So far, there was no reason why Hannah Dyson should be troubled for her share in the plot, or that any one should be afraid of what she might disclose. And yet here she was, on her way to the other side of the world, in the same ship with him! Suppose she were not in the plot, that Kemp had used her name without her

knowledge, that she had found this out and threatened him, and that he took this means of silencing her. *Qui bono?* Well, he had made her accuse herself of forgery, and he could be punished for it. A feeling of relief came over Owen as he worked out this problem. If it were correct it would save him, he thought, from making many painful disclosures. He need only mention Kemp's share; but when he came to consider where this began and ended, he found to his dismay that it could not be separated from the rest. It was woven into the fabric of Pearl's history. He could not mention the Dyson letter without explaining the purpose for which it was written, and the consequences which followed from it.

Deep in these thoughts, he did not notice that the sun was no longer shining on the water, and that the day was darkening.

He was aroused by a touch on the shoulder.

“Fog everywhere,” said Murray. “The ship is sailing into one, and I’m struggling to get out of one. Our mysterious friend is conscious now, and my suspicions are confirmed. Did you ever hear of the poison which the Indians on the Amazon use for their blowpipe arrows?”

“The wourali! Yes, I’ve read of it in ‘Waterton’s Wanderings.’”

“It kills by paralysing the lungs and the heart, and the entire nervous system. Taken in very small doses it only renders the patient completely inanimate.”

“Like chloroform?”

“Not a bit. When you take chloroform you lose your senses. Under the influence of wourali you know what is going on around you. You can hear and see, but you cannot move or speak. Now there is in medicine, but very rarely used, a preparation

of this stuff, known as Curare. Very well. This woman has been made insensible and kept so for days by Curare administered hypodermically."

"Good God! what wickedness! Who did it?"

"That has to appear when she is well enough to be asked."

"Then she did not tell you she had been poisoned?"

"Not with her mouth, but her body says so plainly enough. She has twenty-two marks of the hypodermic needle on her shoulders, where she could not have used it upon herself, and she exhibits all the symptoms of Curare poisoning."

"How strange, how awfully strange! What does the captain say? Hadn't I better"—

"Yes, he wants to see you; sent me for

you, in fact," interrupted Murray, " but I thought it best you should know this much first. We are in for a regular Channel fog. Follow me and be careful you don't slip. The skipper is with her. She is a right good-looking girl, I can tell you, now she's clean. Mind your head ! "

The warning came just in time to save Owen from breaking that organ against a beam, for the ordinary obscurity of the 'tween decks was rendered almost darkness by the fog.

However, they reached the infirmary cabin without accident, and called the captain out.

" Well, sir," asked Murray, " has she spoken again ? "

" Yes," replied the captain, " and she says her name isn't Dyson at all."

" Oh ! if she begins that way, we shall never get at the truth," Murray exclaimed.

“ I daresay she’s has a dozen names. Are you sure ” (this to Owen) “ that you never saw her ? ”

“ Never.”

“ Or she you ? ”

“ Not that I am aware of; but I know so much about her that if you will let me ask her one or two questions she will not dare to deny herself.”

“ I’ll go and see how she is getting on first,” said Murray ; “ she mustn’t be excited on any account.”

“ That’s all very fine ” (from the captain), “ but I’ve got to make up my mind what to do. If there’s been foul play I ought to land her and report it. Anyhow, I don’t see how I can take the poor devil to Australia without a rag to her back or a penny to buy one.”

“ You can come in,” shouted the doctor a

few minutes later. "She's picking up splendidly. Stop a moment, though; let me light my lantern, or you'll upset something in this infernal fog. Now then, my dear," leaning over the bed, "just you try if you can't sit up and speak to this gentleman. Why, you've got your colour back at last, haven't you?" holding the light close to her face. "Turn this way—there! Now, Mr. Owen"—

But as her face came slowly round Mr. Owen gave a shriek of horror, and fell on his knees beside the cot.

"Is—this—your—work?" was asked in a feeble voice.

"No!" he cried. "As I have a soul to be saved, Pearl, not mine. Oh, Pearl! believe me now. Not mine."

CHAPTER X.

REPARATION.

THE captain of the "Bugle Horn" was one of those persons who are quick enough to pick up an idea and act upon it, but are disconcerted by the first change or check. Such facts as that a woman had been hocussed, brought on board his ship insensible, and was being taken to Australia, remained just where they were; but the woman was not what she ought to be—that is, ought to be according to the official passenger list. Her name ought to be Hannah Dyson, and it wasn't. She ought to be a servant, and she was a lady. What business had she to set herself up against the official passenger list?

Reminded that this document was compiled from the counterfoil of the passage tickets, and that Miss Herbert could not be held responsible for falsehoods stated by her enemies, the captain repeated the word with a snort of incredulity—" *Enemies!* " he didn't believe she had any. To his mind it was a put-up job between her and that man who called himself a teacher when he got his passage, and now says he's a clergyman—a pretty clergyman to be mixed up with a woman like that! Like what? Why like any one who'd be in such a mess. It stood to reason she couldn't be any better than she should be to get into it.

The fog was much to blame for this. Nothing puts a captain in a worse temper than a fog going out; unless, indeed, it be a fog coming home. It gives him no rest, no security; plays fantastic tricks with his

senses, distorting sight and sound, scares him with phantoms, and hides real dangers. He must not try to sail out of it, for fear he should run into something; and he must not stop, for fear something should run into him. All he can do is to shorten sail, and wait. Worse than the blackest night, more irritating than a calm, and lacking the excitement which ennobles a storm; your sea fog plays the very dickens with the average skipper, and when a man invested with absolute power gets out of temper, some one is sure to catch it.

In this instance the some one was Pearl. Before the fog came on the captain was more than half disposed to put "the poor devil without a rag to her back or a penny to buy one" ashore, or, at any rate, to hail some passing homeward-bound ship, and have her taken back with her refunded passage money

to start again with. If the fog had not come on he might probably have felt more consideration for the gently-nurtured lady who had been so foully dealt with, and for the friends plunged in an agony of suspense about her fate; but the fog got into his brains, and instead of seeing that the case was worse than he had supposed, and consequently that his former intentions would be more than ever justified; he growled as above recorded.

And this particular fog had a grievance of its own. If it had not come on he would by this time have got so far on his voyage that the expostulations of the doctor, and the entreaties of Owen might have been met with the one word "*Impossible!*" which would have cut discussion short; but now he was being eternally badgered with such questions as what he would do *when* the fog

clears off? or *if* a ship passes? "I hope to the Lord," he exclaimed (not piously) "that no ship will come within a mile of me in this weather."

And he was strictly within his rights. It was no fault of his, or of his owners, or of the merchants who had cargo on board, or of the other passengers, that Pearl had been kidnapped; so why should the voyage be delayed, and insurances risked, by a deviation to please her? When she sent the captain word that she would guarantee him against all loss and give him a hundred pounds to land her at any British port, he snorted an indignant refusal. There are many respectable people who mistake pig-headedness for independence, and he was one of them.

The doctor was afraid of the effect this refusal might have on his patient, and sent Owen to break it to her cautiously.

"You are very kind," she said. "I see by your face that he will not. It can't be helped; but, oh! I am so sorry for poor Cissy, and Mab and George."

"And René?"

A beautiful sea-shell pink flooded her pale face, but the fog hid it.

"And René!" she murmured. "I am always causing him pain."

In all the agonies through which she had passed—agonies of sudden terror, of long-drawn-out despair, of physical pain, and mental torment—she had cried out of the depths of her soul, for help, not from the man she had promised to marry, but from René, to whom she had denied her love because she loved him! Now she was safe, but not through René! Now she knew that what life she had left was worthless to her, except to give to René. And here by

her side, aiding her to live, was the one who stood between her and René more cruelly than death! She had often prayed for death—death or René, and neither came to her relief. Was it, she thought, by way of asserting his own rights, or to try her, that Owen Hilyar had added René to the list of those who suffered for her?

“Will you tell me,” she asked, “what you all thought had become of me?”

“Not at present,” he replied. “The doctor says the subject must be avoided till you are stronger. Suffice it to say now, that I was the only one that thought meanly of you. I thought that, aided by the Marshalls, you had gone away because you could not keep your promise to me.”

“I meant to keep it, Owen; and if I live I will.”

“I have released you from it, dear, long

ago," he told her with his sweet sad smile. "I am on board this ship because, believing what I did, I wished to make it easier for you and René; for the man who has always been strong and loyal; for the man through whom I can make the true reparation; and for you who once loved me. Do you remember that you told me so that dreadful night at Barwell, to comfort me in my selfish self-reproach? Well, that is all past and gone. I left England that you and René might be happy. I have marred your life enough, dear. If, in the far future, looking back through many happy years, you can think of me and say—'Poor fellow! he was always wrong, always weak and selfish, but once when I was in sore distress he was good to me till my better friends came to my assistance;' that is all I hope for."

"I cannot see your face," she said, "and

I have often heard strange voices. Is this *really* you, Owen? Are you speaking?—is this sincere?”

“Quite sincere.”

“You told me that we owed it to ourselves and to God; that it was our duty—were you sincere then?”

“I thought so at the time, but I was not. I did not know then that you loved René. I was blinded by the hope that I might win back what I had lost. I took the name of my God in vain for myself, for my own ends. I saw this when you left me.”

“I did not leave you, Owen, I was”—

“Hush, dear, we must not touch on that. I want to relieve you of one misery, not to remind you of others. It is true you did not leave me, as I supposed, to break your promise; but I found out why you had made

it. *You* were not sincere, Pearl, when you yielded to my teaching."

"I did not yield to it. I yielded—on that condition."

"Which the man you loved could never know for his comfort, and I should always have had to bear."

"Always"

"A double sacrifice! We were very foolish. We are wiser now. I called making mockery of a holy rite, and inflicting misery on you, too—*Reparation* ! and you"—

What he had to say was interrupted by a loud shouting on the main deck, the sound of a rushing crowd, and then a fearful crash, which threw him violently against the side of the cabin—all in quick succession.

"We have run on shore!" he exclaimed, "in the fog. Courage, dearest; be brave. There cannot be great danger, for there is

no wind, and the sea is quite calm. Why, Pearl! don't you see that for *us* this may be a blessing in disguise. We may get ashore, or be taken off in another ship."

"Oh do not leave me," she cried, "I have not strength to move."

"I will never leave you, Pearl," he answered solemnly "until — but let me go, and see what has happened." He broke away from her, for now there came shrieks, and cries for help, and sounds as of splintering wood, and falling rigging. He rushed on deck and the first thing he saw looming through the fog was what might have been some huge black sea monster with a dim red eye, that had seized the ship in its mouth, and was worrying her as a dog does a rat, tearing her with cruel teeth and pressing her more and more on her side, as though to take a firmer hold. In stern reality he saw the bows of a large

iron steamship that had come, stem on, into collision with the "Bugle Horn" striking her in her weakest part, and cutting her down almost to the water's edge. As he stood paralyzed by the sight, the steamer swung round slowly with the tide, wrenching the ship's bulwarks and decks into which her sharp bow had penetrated, as you might tear a match box, and snapping her main rigging like so many pack threads.

The first articulate sound he heard was the voice of his captain shouting to the steamer "Stand by us, for God's sake!—we're sinking."

This served as the signal for a scene of horror; of some heroism, and much baseness. There were nearly three hundred emigrants on board, and the fog was so dense that the mainmast could not be seen from the wheel. Mothers were shrieking for their children,

husbands for their wives. The watch-word of panic was "We are sinking!—board the steamer." In the rush and struggle to scale her side many were thrown into the sea, some fought each other with savage blows and oaths for possession of a rope which might swing them to safety, or a foothold on the bulwarks from which they hoped to climb the slippery iron side. Some lost their senses and stood dumb, others jumped blindly into the sea. One poor wretch was caught between the ships as they rolled slowly together with the swell and fell back, horribly mangled, to a quicker death. Some twenty lives were sacrificed to terror before the struggling, screaming, cursing crowd could be made to realize that boats had been lowered on the other side, and there lay an easy way of escape.

Hilyar—carried away badly by the first rush, had literally to fight his way back to

the companion by which he had come on deck. As he did so he found that his left wrist was almost powerless. He had (as he thought) *saved* himself with his hand, when the collision flung him against the side, and in this excitement did not feel the wrench. And now he wanted all his strength!

In vain he appealed to passengers and crew. "There is a woman below, sick, unable to move. For God's sake help me to bring her on deck!"

"Help her yourself" was the best answer he got.

"Pearl" he cried, as he entered the cabin, "there is danger. I must carry you on deck, do you hear me Pearl? Oh! if she has fainted!" He felt for her face, and as he stooped over the cot she murmured "I tried to get up, and—my strength is all gone. Save yourself Owen. Perhaps I should not

have lived. It is better as it is. And Owen, dear, now that you are so good and noble, will you be friends with poor René, tell him what you know, that—I may say so now—that I loved him.”

“No! if he ever hears those words they shall come from your own lips. Come! at least we can die together.”

Never strong, even in good health, and with one hand disabled, the power which enabled him to take her in his arms and carry her to the deck, was no mere physical force. He laid her down tenderly, and wrapped his coat around her. Not a soul was to be seen, all was silent, save the low lapping of water. The steamer had backed out, and the boats were boarding her a quarter of a mile away. Looking through the breach she had made, he noticed that the darker brown, which was the sea, had crept up closer. The “Bugle Horn,”

was settling down for her last plunge. He shouted with all his force, and to his intense delight a voice answered him out of the fog, it was Murray's.

"Who are you?" he shouted.

"Owen."

"Has Miss Herbert been saved?"

"No, she is here. Where are you?"

"In a boat. I missed you and came back, but I thought she—there's no time to explain, lower her down. Pull two strokes men. It's a poor sick lady."

Here a dim object came in sight, heaving up and down with the swell, and he could see something like the figure of a man standing on it. "Tie a rope round her, under her arms, and lower her," said Murray, "and be quick about it, I'll catch her."

Owen seized a line, wound his handkerchief around it so that it should not cut the

dear tender flesh, and made it fast as he was told. Then he carried her to the side where the breach was.

"I am to lower you down into a boat," he whispered. "The doctor is there to take you, are you afraid?"

"No" she answered, "but I cannot help myself, I am so weak."

"Never mind, but you trust me? If my strength fails, and you fall and are hurt, you will know I did my best?"

"Oh! how could I doubt you now?"

He drew her to the very verge, and kissed her. "René can spare me that," he said with a smile, and then he lowered her down.

"All right!" cried Murray from below. "I've got her. Now come yourself."

"Is she quite safe, not hurt?"

"I tell you man, I've got her. She's as right as she was before."

"Pearl, dear Pearl, can you answer me? Are you safe?"

"I daren't keep near the ship a moment longer," Murray shouted, "she'll sink and suck us all down with her. Jump for your life, and swim. We'll pick you up."

He was kneeling on the wrecked timbers, trying to pierce the fog with loving eyes, and get one glimpse of her—*safe*. Longing to hear once more the sound of her voice, he had no other thought, all else was unheeded.

"Oh Pearl" he cried, "cannot you answer me? cannot you say one word? are you safe?"

"She cannot make you hear," shouted Murray "upon my honour as a man, she is safe. She says thanks to God, and you."

"Are those her words?" cried Owen, starting to his feet.

"Her very own words. Now jump, or it will be too late."

Owen Hilyar raised his hands to the darkened heavens, and murmured "Keep her so, oh Most Merciful ! through this most awful day, and let her"—

The end of his prayer is known only at the Throne to which it went. For the mainmast, badly sprung by the collision and deprived of its rigging, went by the board and with all its yards and tackle and the fore topmast which it dragged with it ; fell crashing over the spot where he stood. The ship heeled over with the strain, there was a mighty swirl and wash of waters ; the "Bugle Horn" gave one last shiver like a dying creature, and then sank to the bottom of the sea.

CHAPTER XI.

RENÉ'S REVENGE.

ON the morning of the 28th October four persons known in this history, started on journeys which were not to be completed to the satisfaction of any one of them. George Marshall and René set off for Paris to seek Mrs. Scott, for although very little credit was given to Mr. Ripley's information, its truth had to be tested, if only to draw the net closer round him in the event of its turning out that he was deceiving them. Lady Pembury left town on her visit to her dear Marchioness, with baggage properly addressed to the station at which she was to alight ; and Lord Longbow (after seeing her off) took train later in the day for Southampton, preceded by a

telegram to the master of his steam yacht to have her ready for sea on his arrival.

George Marshall and René met the fog at Folkestone, and found that the Boulogne boat would not cross. Lady Pembury missed her servants and a portion of her luggage (although Lord Longbow had attended to it in person) at a junction where she had to change trains. Lord Longbow received information which stopped him in the middle of his journey, and caused him to hurry back to town, sending on word that his yacht might be laid up for the winter. A strange incident in *his* travelling was that he had four ladies' trunks (and large ones) with him.

Marshall and Ranlett finding that there was no chance of getting across from where they were, and hearing that the weather was clearer at Newhaven ; made for that port to catch the night packet to Dieppe. On their

way they fell in with the London evening papers and read the news which had so disconcerted the arrangements of "poor Fred." Lord Pembury was dead! He arrived at Strathpelsie Castle in his usual good health, but had been taken suddenly ill as he was dressing for dinner, and shortly after midnight breathed his last. Gout at the heart was the cause alleged.

"You knew him? didn't you?" Marshall asked.

"Yes" replied René, "as well perhaps as he was known to any of his acquaintances. He was a very self-contained man, and not, I am afraid, a happy one."

"Jealous?"

"Better not talk about it now" said René.

He had no reason to love Lady Pem, but being generous to all women he felt sorry for her. Besides he was not in a humour to talk,

or to read, or to do anything, but think of his lost Pearl.

On the platform at Newhaven stood a lady dressed in black who raised a thick veil as the train arrived, and eagerly looked into the windows of the carriages as they passed her. When the last came to a full stop, she clasped her hands with an audible "Oh! what shall I do?" René had recognised her eyes when they flashed into his compartment, and heard the appeal as he alighted.

"Lady Pembury!" he exclaimed, "I cannot tell you how shocked and sorry I am."

She drew back with a start, and a suppressed cry. She had tried to prepare herself for meetings such as this, and rehearsed a stony stare which might be tinted with defiance upon occasion. She knew that people would tell each other how sorry and shocked they were, and smite her with looks of scorn and

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is nothing of the sort, though, here. She has been living too much, 'good-bye,' you understand? Even what I hear she has been doing since this time yesterday."

"Has she a ticket?"

"Yes, and here it is. There are four other women of the same sort in the party. They took charge of her baggage, but I cannot find any of them."

Then the ship itself began to ring out its timeworn, and two men appeared carrying an ordinary police stretcher on which the form of a woman was belted up, a sad spectacle!

"This is the person. You can judge for yourself. Fough! one can smell the trouble a yard off."

A crushed bonnet all awry, and a mass of tangled, matted hair hid her face. She was what had once been a handsome black woman, but it was now torn and stained.

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triumph got up in fancy dress to imitate the sentiments they professed; but for one to come up to her and speak as René did, she was not prepared.

Weary and faint, disappointed and alone with a guilty conscience, the ring of genuine sympathy in his voice struck the finer chords of her nature. She drew the veil down over her face, hung her proud head, and murmured "Is it known already?"

"There is a short paragraph in the evening paper," he replied.

"So soon! so very soon! but" (quickly and touching his arm with trembling fingers) "you will not betray me. You were just and generous with—with women. You don't know what I have suffered, I could endure no longer. I am at the hotel, not under any real name. You will not betray me, René?"

"Betray you!" he repeated, perplexed at

this outburst. "I do not quite understand. No one I think would intrude upon you under the circumstances. I would not have done so, I am sure, unless I thought I could be of service. You were expecting some one were you not?"

"Yes" very feebly.

"To escort you to Scotland?"

"To Scotland!" with a start, "oh no!"

"Well, to your home, to Hadlow. That would of course be the fittest place for you now. I deeply regret that I am unable to offer myself as your escort but I am here with Mr. Marshall on our way to Paris where we hope to find a clue to Pearl—to Miss Herbert, and we have already met with serious delay. Still we can find out all about trains for you, and"—

"It is too late" she interrupted. "Home! how could I possibly go home? I have no

home. He must be here by the next train and then—but I thank you with all my heart Mr. Ranlett. I shall never forget your kindness, never.”

The truth flashed upon him, and his face hardened.

“We have been at cross purposes, Lady Pembury,” he said. “Is the person you expected to meet here, and who as you think, must come by the next train, Lord Longbow? Well, I have no right to ask the question. I can only say that you had better not build upon his coming.”

“Have you seen him? do you know?—has any accident”—she demanded in breathless haste.

“He has probably read the evening paper.”

“And do you think so badly of him as to suppose he would abandon me because our elopement was known?”

“ Ah ! ” said René with a sigh of relief, “ I think I understand now.”

Here, wringing her hands in an agony of abasement, stood a woman of the world who, with the fullest knowledge of its laws and its methods of enforcing them, had started (at last) with her eyes open, *willingly*, upon the broad road which leads to infamy. And she had persecuted Pearl ! Pearl, around whose innocent feet the unsuspected snares had been spread ; Pearl, who was led to her doom as a dove might be carried to the sacrifice. She—this false wife, with the black seeds of shame swelling in her bosom—had persecuted Pearl. A meaner soul than René’s would have drunk in delicious revenge. She had ruined herself, *and for nothing*. At the moment when, with falsehood and craft, she slipped away to join her lover, she was a free woman—free to marry him in a year,

and keep her honour and her reputation as bright (to all eyes but their own) as ever.

"You must come with me to the hotel," he said, "I have something to show you."

We know what he had to show her. You can imagine what response her conscience gave, "I have killed him" she gasped as the paper fell from her hand. She recalled that mocking message which—(as she told Mrs. Chevington)—was to give him an appetite for his dinner like sherry and bitters, but which she had composed to "sting." It had stung—stung him to death, and she found herself guilty of his murder. She had taken his life, and then—oh! the horror of it! At the moment when, on leaving the theatre she had whispered "Come early" into her lover's ear; her husband might have been in the death agony. When, during that early visit, they concluded that life with him would be

made unbearable by further outrages his jealousy would inflict—he was laying dead and cold; the last angry word spoken, and the last chance of reconciliation gone. By some perversion of remorse it seemed to her that the crime plotted against him when dead, was worse than if he had lived to suffer by it.

René finding her incapable of discussing her present critical position, and having no time to spare, took the case into his own hands and thus had his revenge upon the woman who called Pearl a “creature.”

After consultation with Marshall he sent this message to Strathpelsie Castle.

“Lady Pembury, called suddenly to Paris on a mission of affection for an old friend, learns for the first time at Newhaven of her loss. She is too prostrated to travel or even to give instructions at present.”

And this to Lord Longbow :

“Leave friends to act, say nothing and all will be well.”

So by Pearl's lover, and in Pearl's name she was saved. Quite a creditable story was made of it. She was actually on her way to the Marchioness when she received the news that the poor girl (meaning Miss Herbert) was in the deepest distress, having suffered shipwreck, and being unable to identify herself and obtain funds to get back home. Without a moment's hesitation, the dear, generous thing (Lady Pem) joined young Ranlett and Mr. Marshall, and went to her assistance, but when they got to Newhaven she heard the news about her husband, and of course had to come back home. Would she marry Longbow now ? “Oh, dear no !—that boy ?” The great world had maidens to dispose of, and took the earliest opportunity of

putting a spoke in the widow's wheel. The great world had the best authority for stating that Lord Longbow had got tired of this boyish flirtation and went away on a voyage to the Mediterranean directly he heard of poor Pembury's death, on purpose, you know, to keep out of her way. The fact was that René, acting in her interests, ordered him off.

If all be well that ends well, Lady Pem had reasons to be grateful, and let me do her credit to say she was so. If lies told by a man to save a woman's honour be not justified, I am afraid that René Ranlett has much to expiate. He had to wade through a slough of mendacity which of course got deeper as he went on. He had to tell lies, write lies, act lies, look lies, by the score, and I regret to say that the Judge, his father, backed him up. What helped them most was that Lady Pem's escapade did not

stand alone to be examined and criticised. It went down the public gullet weighted and gilded by the grave and evident truths of the story in which it was only an incident. To this story we must return, not taking the trouble to go to Paris after Mrs. Scott because you can guess now that Ripley's motive was to gain time and get Pearl's friends out of the way, whilst she was disposed of as already stated.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAIN SPRING.

MANY days passed before Pearl could piece together in her mind all that had happened to her so as to be able to give a full narrative. There was no necessity to force her memory, even if the state of her health had allowed, for Mr. Ripley "squealed" (as Judge Ranlett said) on the first turn of the screw, gave away his employer, and made a clean breast of it. During his chequered career he had had a transaction with Father Florian, not to be detailed here, which assured the latter that he possessed sufficient medical skill, and moral depravity, to be relied upon to put a troublesome woman out of the way for a month or two. That was how this villany

shaped itself in Mr. Flowers' mind. The troublesome woman was to be drugged and locked up somewhere, until Owen Hilyar came to his senses. She was not to be hurt—more than was absolutely necessary—and if others had to suffer on her account, that could not be helped. A great object had to be gained and minor considerations flowing from matters of detail, were not to be entertained. You might take a dangerous plaything away from a child and hide it, with less compunction than Mr. Flowers felt about what he compassed.

The main objects to be attained were secrecy and certainty, and we know that up to a certain point they were gained. Mr. Ripley, was not, however, as clever as he fancied. He was right in thinking he could administer the Curare poison in such a manner as to produce complete prostration for a long

period, without endangering life ; but he did not know that the patient would remain conscious of all that passed around her, and be able to identify persons, and describe places with sufficient clearness to suggest evidence which might send him to the gallows, if what he had done were a capital offence.

Successful in getting Pearl to visit Martin's Place, Ripley met her just as the Judge had prognosticated, with a story that Mr. Kemp had made a mistake about the number, and begged she would give him a call, as he wished to speak to her about Hannah Dyson, before they went to see her. To this Pearl at first demurred. Let him show her the right house, and send Mr. Kemp to her there. The pretended porter could not do this, because he did not know the right house. His orders were to meet the lady, and take her to Mr. Kemp's. That

was all he knew about it. Mr. Kemp's house wasn't two minutes' walk, so she might send away the cab, and he—the porter—would carry her portmanteau. She consented, and found an elderly man with a long, grey beard waiting for her at the door, who, having introduced himself as Mr. Kemp, asked her to walk in.

The other Mr. Kemp had previously warned the occupants of the not too reputable house in which he lodged, that a lady was coming to undergo an operation under the influence of chloroform, and that she would have to be removed in a cab as soon as it was dark. He managed so as to slip into the back room, and throw off his disguise without being seen, and then whilst poor unsuspecting Pearl was listening to the repentant Dyson's woes (as invented by the conspirators) that part of the above pretence which related to chloroform was actually performed.

At dusk she was carried into a cab, and taken insensible to a house in a low part of Wapping, and a story—ah! the cruelty of it!—made up to account for her condition, and disarm sympathy for it. She was a confirmed drunkard, had *delirium tremens*, and so they (the people about) mustn't be surprised if they heard her screaming. A strong-armed woman who had been discharged from Mr. Ripley's hospital for good reasons, was engaged to attend her, and implicitly carried out the line of treatment which Mr. Ripley ordered. They drugged her with what the nurse afterwards swore she thought was morphine, and when the dear victim with some dim notion of her plight refused to eat or drink, she was held, and the Curare poison injected under her skin. "There's that—crazy woman hollering agin!" was all the outer world knew, or said.

Mr. Flowers did not trouble to ask himself

how long this was to last—how long it could last. It had to last till Owen Hilyar could be made to believe that the troublesome woman had run away from him. The “personal” in the *Times* was inserted by him to favour this solution. Others were to have followed in a similar strain, but the question of the ring, which could not be answered, spoiled this part of the plan. As it mattered not to him how long Pearl suffered, Flowers was content to wait, and take advantage of what might happen. Being a fatalist, he made up his mind that whatever might happen would be for his ends, and the glory of the delusion which possessed him. As soon as Hilyar gave her up, a pledge never to marry would be extracted from him, and then Pearl might be carried out at night and left somewhere in the street, where the police would find her unable (*tiste* E. Ripley)

to give the slightest account of herself, or what had happened to her. This latter part of the plot was not elaborated when the time came for its execution. Almost simultaneously with Hilyar's surprising renunciation, came the equally astonishing, but less agreeable news, that Pearl's friends had gained a clue to her abduction. The old plans would not do now. She had to be got out of the way in such a manner as to give her enemies a long start, in the impending pursuit, or baffle it altogether. When the news arrived that the "Bugle Horn" had been sunk, and the list of passengers saved appeared with no Hannah Dyson on it; Mr. Flowers breathed freely, and had to put up with some insolent assumption of superiority from his subordinate who had conceived the requisite villany. "*We didn't drown her,*" he said. "*We didn't make the fog, or send the steamer*

blundering through it. *We're* all right. *We've* not one to fear but that old Yankee fool, and he's satisfied—thanks to E. R.," he concluded with the laugh of self-applause common to his class. Now the person intimated as that old Yankee fool was by no means satisfied with the excuse made by the astute E. R. that he had been misled about Mrs. Scott; and was keeping a bright watch upon him.

The boat into which Murray had taken Pearl, belonged to the "Bugle Horn" and was reported "missing." She lost the steamer in the fog and was picked up the next day by a fishing smack, and taken to Deal. By this time the reaction had set in; Pearl's splendid constitution and courageous mind alike broke down under the repeated blows to which they had been subjected, and for more than a week life and reason hovered in

the balance. When at last it became safe to ask her a question that might recall the horrors through which she had passed, Murray sent for the Marshalls and then Mr. Edgar Ripley was roughly awakened from his dream of security. Identified by Murray as the person who—under the name of Kemp—had brought Pearl on board the “Bugle Horn” he stood associated with the first and last act of the crime that had been committed, so clearly, as to present the probability of a long seclusion from society, combined with unpleasant, physical exertion in one of Her Majesty’s establishments connected with penal servitude—a probability which he endeavoured to escape by “peaching” as has already been stated.

The Judge stood out for prosecuting him with the utmost rigour of the law, on the principle of the bird-in-hand proverb, but

was overruled with arguments which were certainly valid at the time they were made. You must, if you please, put yourself in these people's place and judge their conclusions by the light under which they were formed. They could find no adequate motive for Pearl's abduction. Owen Hilyar was the only one, not engaged in it, who could have put them on the right track, and he was dead. One thing alone seemed clear to them, viz., that she had an enemy capable of spending large sums of money (for Ripley had been heavily bribed) and sticking at no crime, short of murder, to injure her. For her future safety that enemy should be discovered and disarmed. What was the use of punishing one of his tools, when in this wicked world of ours there are scores of others ready to do even worse at his command for the like considerations?

So a solemn promise was made to Ripley that if he would betray his principal he should go free, and when he did so, and they looked around for evidence to corroborate him not an atom was to be found! There was only his word—the confession of an accomplice—at which Mr. Flowers scoffed. Who would believe the story of a scoundrel like Ripley against him?—and *such* a story! So absurd! so ridiculously improbable! He had urged Mr. Hilyar not to marry, as was his duty; but if they would consult Lady Pembury they would find that he withdrew his opposition as soon as the marriage was determined upon. Ripley was a drunkard, a cheat, and a liar. He was a fraudulent bankrupt. He had been discharged from the Royal Mail Steamship Company's service for houcussing a female passenger on his own account. It was infamous that he (Mr.

Flowers) should be accused on the bare, unsupported word of a man like Ripley !

There was no corroboration which could touch Mr. Flowers. He could not be identified with the man in the grey beard who passed himself off as Mr. Kemp that day when the lady was chloroformed ; and the maid-of-all-work at Ripley's lodgings swore stoutly that she had never seen him before in her life. No one could be found to say that he and Ripley had been seen together. Certain it was that Ripley suddenly emerged from the condition in which he was wont to borrow sixpences, and appeared in good clothes with plenty of money in the pockets. Certain also that he had no motive against Pearl, personally. *Some one* had employed him, but there was not a jot of evidence that this *some one*, who had acted with extreme caution, was Flowers.

"Whatever we may suspect," concluded Judge Ranlett, "it comes to this, if the rascal" (meaning Ripley) "had accused Mr. Gladstone or the Pope of Rome, we should have as much chance of convicting either of them as Mr. Flowers."

"It's perfectly shameful," Cissy cried, "that there should be such laws. Of course he" (meaning Ripley) "is telling the truth. Doesn't the cabman swear to him? Didn't the servant at his house recognise Pearl as the lady that was chloroformed? Doesn't the nurse, who ought to be transported for treating *any* one that way, own to what she did? And our own blessed, suffering angel who wouldn't tell a lie to save her life!—why should they doubt her? If he's telling the truth about everything else, why can't they believe him against that wretch?"

The Judge smiled at this logic.

“Suppose,” he asked, “that he had denounced me?”

“Nonsense! Every one knows that it couldn’t have been you.”

“That is precisely what Mr. Flowers is entitled to say of himself. As things are, the law will not touch him.”

“And I cannot,” muttered René. “Oh, the devil knows his business, and lets out those sort of contracts to women, and to men one mustn’t cowhide.”

As time goes on they perceive that all this is for the best. Flowers, brought to bay, would have fought to the bitter end. Another man might be generous towards the woman he had so injured; but no concession of this sort could be expected from him. He would have raked up Pearl’s past, and defended himself at her expense. They resolved to leave bad alone, and they were right.

Of Mr. Flowers I have only this much more to say—Having lost Owen Hilyar, he picked up four or five silly young clergymen whom he had infected with his peculiar views, took a large house in Sloane Street, and started what he called THE GRANARY OF THE GOOD SEED, where services were performed according to a rubric of his own, and sermons and lectures delivered in the cause of the new Church, which was to evangelise the world. Being strikingly sensational, and provocative of hysterics; a good many women—some in good positions—became members, and made vestments, and played at confessions and penance. But there was no life in it, and no money when its founder (who reassumed his name of Father Florian) had spent all he had to give. It broke up to the great satisfaction of some of its inmates who had not the pluck to secede or rebel.

Father Florian was thrown on the world again, and reappeared—as such men will—confident as ever, and apparently none the worse for all the judgments which had been obtained against him.

He died in an asylum for criminal lunatics, having been acquitted of theft on the ground of insanity. A diamond bracelet was missed from a house where he visited, and when it was traced to him many other similar objects were found. He had borrowed them, he admitted, to raise funds for carrying on the great religious revolution that was impending. The owners had nothing to complain of. They had been given many opportunities of paying voluntarily, and had neglected them. They were deprived temporarily of the possession of their plate or their jewels; but would be repaid fourfold when Holy Church got her own. Besides, they would

have the satisfaction of having contributed to the good cause. Holy Church had a right to these contributions, and if people did not make them willingly it was proper that they should be obtained as circumstances offered. Holy Church was entitled to the assistance of the secular power to compel attention to her wants and obedience to her decrees. The secular power was recalcitrant—well! it followed naturally that Holy Church should help herself. This was his defence made some six years after Owen Hilyar's death, with the utmost gravity, and some scorn for such as would not accept it. If the word of a lunatic goes for anything, he had held these doctrines from his boyhood. If M. Paul Burt is to be believed, they were taught him. This being so, his lunacy consisted in thinking they could be put in practice. How long had he been subject to

this delusion ? The mad doctors at the trial were of opinion that it had come upon him recently ; but they did not know what had happened to Pearl Herbert.

CHAPTER XIII.

"GIVE HER SOME MORE."

A MONTH has passed since the "Bugle Horn" went down; but Pearl cannot yet be removed from the lodging which Murray had taken for her at Deal. The whole of the house—which is a pleasant one with a fine view of the sea—is engaged now for "her party," which consists of the Marshalls (George running down from Saturdays to Mondays), Judge Ranlett, and an elderly lady with a soft face and beautiful white hair, about whom Pearl—as she recovers consciousness, and begins to think—is puzzled.

René lives at an hotel, and his name has not been mentioned yet in the sick room, as any and every subject which can possibly

excite his patient, is, by Dr. Murray's order, to be taboo. In spite of all his care, and the skill of the great doctor who comes twice a week from London, her bodily strength comes back very slowly.

"Cissy, dear," she asked one day, "is that woman who went out just now a professional nurse?"

Cissy nodded.

"And a splendid nurse she is; don't you think so?"

"She is very gentle and patient with me."

"And so fond of you," urged Cissy.

"That is what worries me," complained the invalid. "Why should she be? Sometimes when I have awakened at night I have found her on her knees beside the bed praying, with my hand clasped in hers. And I have felt her kiss me! There is something

strange about her. Nurses don't pray for their patients, and kiss them. Besides, she looks and speaks quite like a gentlewoman."

"Oh, lots of ladies go out as nurses when they are poor," said Cissy. "Don't ask her any questions just now. She might be offended."

And there the subject rested for that day, but not because Pearl was satisfied. There was something familiar to her in the grave yet gentle face which watched her, to anticipate her every wish before it became a want; and in the smile with which her thanks were received. But this indefinable something did not strike her as being genuine. It seemed, indistinctly, as though it were borrowed—that it ought to be somewhere else, and this nurse had no right to it. And one evening, when she was in a half-dozed state she saw (or dreamed) a shocking sight.

She saw Judge Ranlett put his arm round the nurse, who, instead of resenting the indignity, pulled his face down to hers by his whiskers, and kissed him !.

And yet after such depravity she came to the bedside, put on that sweet expression, and called her " dear."

" Nurse," said Pearl, " the doctor said I am not to be worried."

" And you shall not be, dear."

" You are doing so now."

" I /"

" Yes. Don't you know that nurses do not call their patients '*dear*.' There is something odd about you that I cannot understand, and it worries me. Who are you ?"

" Your nurse. What do you want ? Have you anything to complain of ?"

" No—oh no—you are most kind and attentive ; but—not like a nurse—that's it.

If you were my own mother you might behave as you do to me. And yet you are a stranger. You know nothing of me."

"Oh yes I do."

"About the poison and the shipwreck?—yes, of course, every one knows that, and I daresay you are sorry for me; but you look more than sorry, and you have been praying for me."

"May God grant my prayers for you, sweet child."

"There again!" cried Pearl, fretfully. "*Sweet child!* What right have you to call me 'sweet child?'"

"I think you very sweet, and dear, and good."

"You don't know me," sighed Pearl.

"I do. I know everything that has happened you since your poor mother died."

"Ah! I see! You are very intimate with

Judge Ranlett. I suppose it is he who told you."

"It was."

"I think it was most impertinent and uncalled for, and I shall tell him so." Indignantly.

"There! that's enough," said the nurse, getting anxious, "you must not excite yourself."

"It is *not* enough. I insist upon knowing more. It seems to me as though you were all out of your senses. My most private affairs discussed with a sick nurse! It is shameful!"

"How so? Does it seem to lessen our care and love for you?"

The expression which puzzled Pearl deepened on her nurse's face. Her intonation of the word *love* had a delightful thrill in it. Some subtle power in her smile sub-

dued anger, and made Pearl doubt her senses. How could Judge Ranlett have dared to take a liberty with that saint-like face, and how could it mask a nature that would so disgrace itself with a married man? Had she (Pearl) been dreaming? She could settle that question at once.

"Nurse," she said firmly, "these evasions are distressing me, and allow me to say they are not creditable to you. I will know the truth. What is there between you and Judge Ranlett?"

"Why do you ask?"

"On account of what I saw when he left the room just now."

"We have known each other for nearly forty years," she began deliberately, then seeing the change that came over her patient's face she went on in quite a different manner.

"Ah, Pearl, my child! I ought not to tell

you ; but you look so unhappy. Did you see him ? We thought you were asleep. He kissed me, and you are shocked ! Well, darling, he kissed René's mother, and she will give the kiss to you."

It completed the revelation which was dawning on Pearl in an upside-down sort of way, when she heard herself called " Pearl, my child." The kind, grave look was René's, the gentle smile was René's, and the dearest word of all was spoken in René's voice. And now the arms that held her were René's mother's arms, and the tears which mingled with her own were René's mother's tears ; but her heart sank within her as she thought, " They love me for rejecting him."

" Now, my precious," said the old lady, " you must positively go to sleep. Not another word do you get out of me to-night. If the doctor finds you not so well in the

morning, I shall catch it nicely. So for my sake be a good girl and go to sleep.”

In the morning the doctor was surprised. Pulse firmer, respiration stronger, face brighter. Informed of the “treatment” which might have produced this change, he said—

“Very well ! give her some more.”

And they did.

The Judge came, and he also kissed her, and called her “daughter.” Told her why his wife had been sent for—not to show the gratitude of his family for sparing René, but to plead his cause.

“You haven’t a bit of right,” said he, “to say you won’t marry a man because you love him, so long as you’re sure he loves *you*. René isn’t the sort of man to go back on a girl in the way you fear. He has picked you out of all the world for his wife, and all the

rest of the world may go and be hanged for all he cares. And let me tell you he isn't a green boy to be caught by a pretty face, and not look under it. He's a cool, long-headed, sensible man is René, like one of our four-mile horses—not much good for a dash; but he stays over a long course, and you can bet your bottom dollar on him. As for us, I tell you frankly I was against it once, and so was my madam; but we've studied it all over, and the more we know you the more we like you, and the heartier we will stand by you, dearie; so don't you mind. Do what your heart tells you, and make my poor boy happy."

Then his "madam" took it up, and Pearl lay silent with her eyes shut, and her thin hands folded tightly over her bosom as though to keep down its throbs; drinking in rough and tender words of comfort and of

hope, longing to give her answer, yet delaying it for the sake of hearing more praise of René, more assurances of his love, and the respect of those who loved him. The next question was, "might he come and hear it for himself?"

"Oh," she murmured, "wait a little. Tell him I—I will not say 'no' again; but to wait till I'm better. I will get better so quickly now, dearest Mrs. Ranlett, I *must* be looking so wretchedly thin and—and—horrid; he—he would be shocked to see me."

"I am of the opinion," said the Judge, "that he would rather see your ghost than the handsomest woman out, in a six hundred dollar gown."

So she took "some more" according to the doctor's orders.

* * * * *

The Albert Works flourished. The firm in

London is Ranlett and Marshall. Their agents in New York are Ranlett and Co., in Chicago, Ranlett and Vaughan. Vaughan has married René's sister, does not know blue from green, or an Etruscan vase from a draining pipe; but being a man in good society, and of indomitable energy, the manner in which he makes Marshall's wares fly over the great West is (as his rivals say) "a caution."

The Marshalls go to America every winter, and stay with the René Ranletts at New York, and visit the old folks. The old folks have had enough of the sea, and stay at home; but René and his wife return their partner's visits in the spring. The Countess of Longbow (once known as Lady Pem) cannot quite make the René Ranletts out. Doing nothing that costs her the slightest trouble without a selfish motive, she had concluded

that René's services were given for value he hoped to receive, and is much surprised to have her overtures to take up Pearl during the London season received with coolness. "The woman is afraid," she thinks. The woman is not in the least afraid. Her unhappy past is blotted out. In her full heart there is no room for it. She has made a social success for herself on both sides of the water. The reason is that René does not like his wife to associate with the Countess, and this ugly truth at last dawns on her ladyship's mind. "He doesn't consider me good enough for" (she was going to *think* "the creature," but her own past rises, and she is obliged to substitute) "his wife." This is gall and wormwood, and is not her only trouble. Mrs. Tracy sits upon her shoulders like a showily dressed, upper middle-class old woman of the sea; has to be invited to

all her parties, to be kissed in the presence of Personages, and be called "dearest Sophia."

All the blame for those forged letters can now be thrown on dead Owen Hilyar, and Pearl be completely exonerated by a careful confusion of dates. Still "dearest Sophia" knows that there is something wrong, and acts with great discretion. Her only mistake is to dislike René Ranlett, and try to lower him in Lady Longbow's estimation. She does not know that but for fear of René Ranlett the Countess would cut her dead.

"I suppose," sighed the Countess, when she was "at home" again after her second honeymoon, "you will all call me *Lady Bow* now." This was intended as an order to such as had engaged the privilege of calling her *Lady Charlie*, and *Lady Pem*; as it suited her ideas to be distinguished by a pet name.

"I don't think *Lady Long* would sound nice, do you? So having taken the first syllable of poor dear Charlie's title, the last of Fred's will do quite well for a change."

But her world was angry with her for her second marriage, and would call her nothing but *Lady Longbow*.

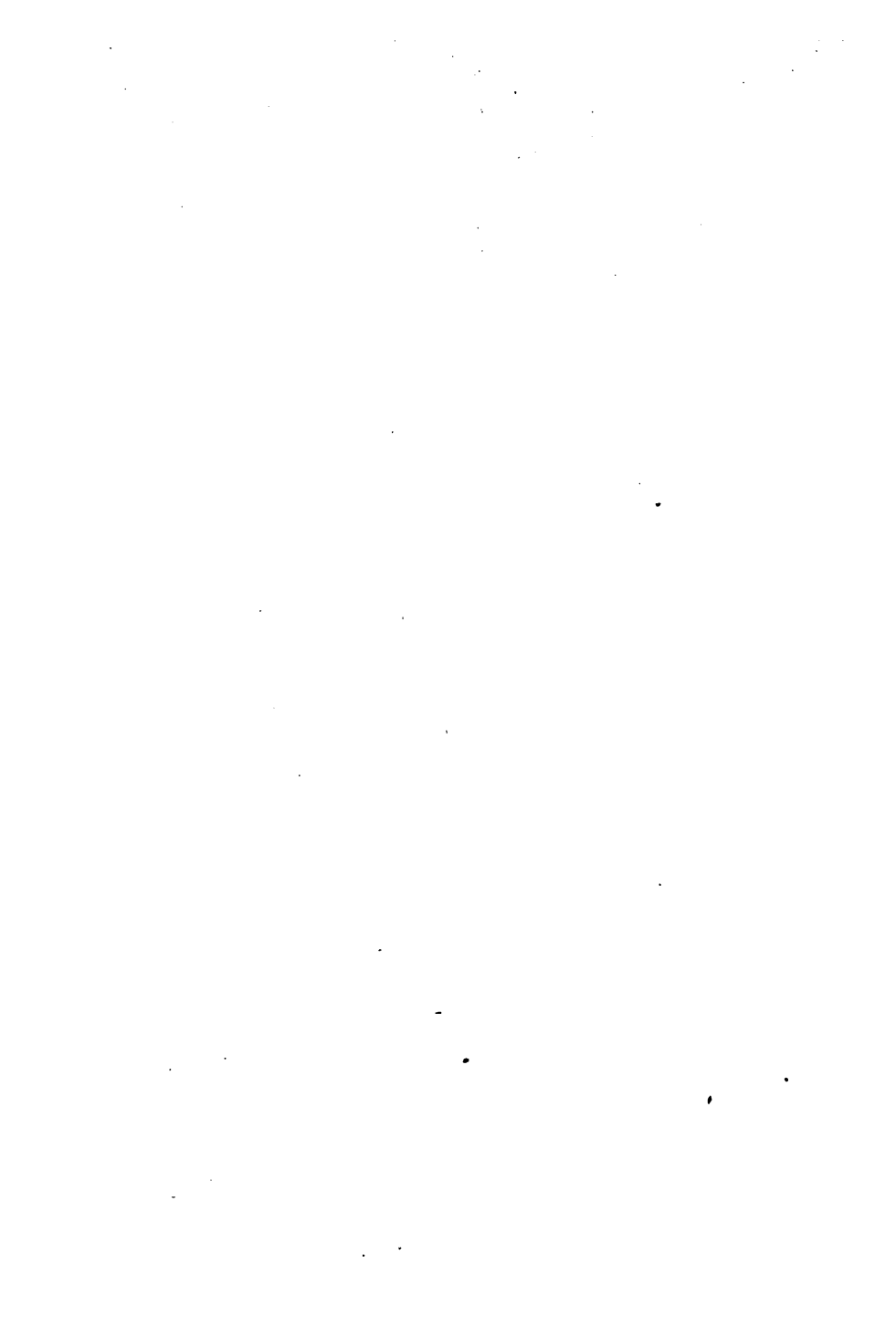
This is a small matter; but it shows how the tide has set.

* * * * *

Come to a grand ball in Fifth Avenue. All the world and his wife are there, and the latter is dressed to perfection. A pair of golden youths are standing in a doorway, and says one, "Who's the pretty woman in blue dancing with René Ranlett?" to which the other replies, "That? Oh! that's his English partner's wife, Mrs. Marshall."

Cissy *dancing*! Why, where is the rheumatism? Gone, and Mab has a brother, if you please, named René, two months younger than Pearl's George.

THE END.



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Table 1

